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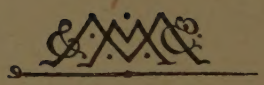

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SCOTTISH LITERATURE

CHARACTER & INFLUENCE

BY

G. GREGORY SMITH

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PREFACE

THESE ten connected Essays deal with two subjects, the character or habit of Scottish Literature (Chapters I.-V.) and the influence which that literature has exerted on others (Chapters VI.-X.). The book is not offered as a history, though in places, where details are handled in support of the argument, it may assume the manner of narrative. It claims to be mainly critical, and it carries with it the author's confession that he knows how difficult it is to set forth a corporate literary character or to indicate the direction of a literary influence; as it is to win assent to a general judgement, when the survey is so wide, when the proofs are not at all points complete, and when there are prepossessions, not always literary, which decline to be adjusted. Yet the venture seemed worth making, partly because of these risks, but chiefly because the way was untrodden. The author consoles himself that, if his interpretation prove inadequate, he may have served some purpose in reconstituting the evidence.

Much of the material is already familiar to readers of Scottish Literature, but some of it may be allowed to be new, or set in another light and in fresh relationships.

February, 1919.

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CHAPTER I

TWO MOODS

It is never easy to describe national idiosyncrasy, but Englishmen think they know their Scot. He has long been a very near neighbour, and every habit of his has become familiar. In his literature, as in his other activities, he stands so self-confessed that any man of intelligence can—as they phrase it in the high places of Jargon—"discern the true Scottish note." Yet one sometimes wonders what these words are intended to mean, and whether they are not used, in an offhand impressionist way, to turn the reader from stricter enquiry. For Criticism has learnt as much from that sacred bird the lapwing as from the sacred ostrich.

Many in the South have a ready touchstone for the detection of Scottish quality. By an easy metaphor they transfer to Scottish literature the eccentricities which have vexed their five senses in their dealings with the aggressive North. They think of the freakish colour-schemes of the tartans, of the skirl of the pipes, of the reek of haggis, of

the flavour of John Barleycorn, in one or more of his three disguises, of the rudeness of the thistle. They seem to see, hear, and gust these glaring, noisy, redolent things at every turn in Northern art. They allow that there are occasions when these qualities are proper and even pleasing, but on the whole these are not comfortable virtues and they are sadly lacking in the finesse required of the superior artist. Others, declining this crude analogy, discover their Scot in quaint words and accent, in a certain whinstone jocularity, in a patriotism rampant as his lion and prickly as his motto, in an idealism tempered with kirk-politics and a love of small change. To these, as to the tartan-and-haggis critics, it appears to be of little moment that they should show that the Scot thus gives himself away when he takes pen in hand, or that they should testify, on oath, that they have ever met such a guy in real life or reputable romance. The fiction is too useful when they are at a loss or have a crow to pluck with the North; and it at once assumes an air of truth when the Perfervids rush in with vulgar clamour against southern prejudice.

Generalities on the Scot himself or on national genius are here irrelevant. We are reminded how Sainte-Beuve[1] dealt with Nisard's attempt to answer the question 'What is French genius?'

[1] *Causeries du Lundi*, xv. 211.

He showed that the setting-up of a standard and the measuring of books and periods by it are always inadequate, even in classicist France; that the method does not allow for the variety of Nature's moulds; and that there is no Genius which presides over a nation's literature with the authority of a Platonic archetype. The warning is not unnecessary here, for critics, Scottish as well as English, have approached northern work with strong prepossessions on what they choose to call the essential and abnormal in Scotticism, and have explained and judged both the whole literature and its parts in terms of a pattern which is imaginary, or, if it be framed, as it so often is, on their knowledge of Burns and Burns alone, is illusory. In the second place, it is well to be on guard against concerning ourselves overmuch with externals, as if we must judge a man by his clothes. Though this counts for something in the pictorial or plastic medium—for when Rodin's Victor Hugo declines the tailor there is no telling whether he is a great poet or a marooned philosopher—it fails in the interpretation of literature. It should not confirm even the hastiest of critics in the heresy that Scotticism is only a matter of filibeg and muslin-kail.

Two considerations of contrary bearing present themselves at the outset. One is of encouragement; that the literature is the literature of a

small country, that it runs a shorter course than others, and that there is no linguistic divorce between its earlier and later stages, as in southern English.[1] In this shortness and cohesion the most favourable conditions seem to be offered for the making of a general estimate. But, on the other hand, we find at closer scanning that this cohesion, at least in formal expression and in choice of material, is only apparent, that the literature is remarkably varied, and that it becomes, under the stress of foreign influence and native division and reaction, almost a zigzag of contradictions. The antithesis need not, however, disconcert us. Perhaps in the very combination of opposites—what either of the two Sir Thomases, of Norwich and Cromarty, might have been willing to call 'the Caledonian antisyzygy'—we have a reflection of the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability, which is another way of saying that he has made allowance for new conditions, in his practical judgement, which is the admission that two sides of the matter have been considered. If therefore Scottish history and life are, as an old northern writer said of something else, "varied with a clean contrair spirit," we need not be surprised to find that in his

[1] Whatever claims, still unknown, Northumbrian Old English may have on Lowland literature; or whatever whims the Middle Scots poets chose to indulge.

literature the Scot presents two aspects which appear contradictory. Oxymoron was ever the bravest figure, and we must not forget that disorderly order is order after all. We can be indifferent to the disciples of De Quincey who will suspect us of making "ambitious paradoxes" and "false distinctions." We may dwell on these incongruities, the better to explain their remarkable synthesis in Scottish literature; as we may, in a later chapter, on the breaks and thwarts, the better to show the continuity of a literary tradition.

One characteristic or mood stands out clearly, though it is not easily described in a word. We stumble over 'actuality,' 'grip of fact,' 'sense of detail,' 'realism,' yet with the conviction that we are proceeding in the right direction. We desire to express not merely the talent of close observation, but the power of producing, by a cumulation of touches, a quick and perfect image to the reader. What we are really thinking of is 'intimacy' of style. Scottish literature has no monopoly of this, which is to be found in the best work everywhere, and is indeed a first axiom of artistic method, no matter what processes of selection and recollection may follow; but in Scots the zest for handling a multitude of details rather than for seeking broad effects by suggestion is very persistent. When Allan Ramsay commended two of the authors

represented in his *Ever Green* because they "painted to the life," he might have said this of nearly all the writers in his collection. Everywhere it is the Dutch style—interiors, country folk and town 'bodies,' farmyard and alehouse; everywhere a direct and convincing familiarity; little or nothing left out, and much almost pedantically accurate. 'Matter-of-fact' shall we say, befitting the practical genius of the Scot, and the seriousness which provoked Sydney Smith's taunt? Some would see in this gluttony of the particular the nemesis of the national earnestness, and conclude that in a literature so enmeshed there is no play for lighter qualities, that the writers must 'joke wi' difficulty' and be in no mood for fun or faery. Half truths make good theories.

In Scott, for example, we find that much of his success in description, whether of scene, or movement, or conversation, is achieved by the piling up of detail, and that in those passages which our impatient generation calls the duller, the failure, such as it is, is often due to extravagance in the use of material. There are many places, especially in the Waverley Novels, where the description leaves nothing to the imagination; which, if made the task of half a dozen artists, would painfully disabuse them of belief in their own originality. The reader will recall such passages as the account of the Green Room at the entry of Oldbuck and

Lovel ;[1] or, in the same novel, of the cave to which Lovel is taken by Edie ;[2] or the parallel, yet fuller, sketch in *Ivanhoe* of the Black Knight's approach to the hermitage ;[3] or the picture of Old Mortality on his white pony, drawn to a 'hair tether,' as no other nag, not even the palfrey of Chaucer's monk, or Rocinante, has been portrayed. There is nothing omitted for the illustrator who would venture. Perhaps it is because the 'instructions' are so absolute that Scott has escaped so well from foolish commentary in black and white.[4] But it remains a question whether this revel in minutiae does not strain the art of descriptive prose which is something more than inventory: as we seem to see in an earlier novelist, also a Scot, whose persistency in piling up details does not always achieve the success of the opening scene of *Sir Launcelot Greaves*. Defoe, our master realist, does not so distrust his reader ; and Fielding, who was realist enough, knew when to hold his hand.

In his verse, however, Scott's keen sense of movement, his greatest 'romantic' gift to his age, produces happier results. There—it may be because he is working with a different medium—the close succession of minute touches neither

[1] *The Antiquary*, ch. x. [2] *ib.*, ch. xxi. [3] ch. xvi.

[4] Even the 'aids' in the Author's Edition have only a vignette or decorative interest; as Turner's too in the *Poems*.

oppresses us nor distracts us in our enjoyment of the complete effect.

"Day set on Norham's castled steep,
And Tweed's fair river, broad and deep,
And Cheviot's mountains lone:
The battled towers, the donjon keep,
The loop-hole grates where captives weep,
The flanking walls that round it sweep,
In yellow lustre shone.
The warriors on the turrets high,
Moving athwart the evening sky,
Seem'd forms of giant height;
Their armour, as it caught the rays,
Flash'd back again the western blaze,
In lines of dazzling light.

St. George's banner, broad and gay,
Now faded, as the fading ray
Less bright, and less, was flung;
The evening gale had scarce the power
To wave it on the donjon tower,
So heavily it hung. . . ."

Full as these lines from *Marmion* are, there is no overcrowding of detail. By the climax of individual touches, notwithstanding the aid of word and vowel ("So heavily it hung") and the canter of the rhyme, the pictorial success is achieved. But 'pictorial success' is, *pace* Pitt's compliment,[1] a poor phrase for the poet's triumph in the trenches at Torres Vedras, when soldiers under fire took

[1] "This is a sort of thing which I might have expected in painting, but could never have fancied capable of being given in poetry"—in reference to the perplexity of the harper in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* when requested to play. See Lockhart, *Life*, ii. 226. And see Chapter IX., *infra*.

courage from their captain's reading of the battle-passage in the sixth canto of *The Lady of the Lake*.[1]

In Burns the evidence is not less convincing; in the opening lines of *Tam o' Shanter* and in the central episode at Alloway Kirk, in the satire on Captain Grose and in the climax of Hornbook's delinquencies, and in the rush of *Hallowe'en*. As it is in Fergusson,[2] and in Ramsay before him, and in yet earlier specimens of the intimate style, such as *Christis Kirk on the Green*; or in the anglicized Thomson,[3] where this same evidence is the main excuse for certain hackneyed sayings about 'Scottish quality' and 'Scottish sense of colour.' As it is, too, in many passages in the older prose, such as Pitscottie's description of the royal banquet in Athole, or the pastoral monologue in the *Complaynt of Scotlande*—each a crude endeavour after realism by a conglomerate of details.

[1] Lockhart's *Life*, iii. 327; and see *infra*, p. 251.

[2] Cf. *Auld Reekie*:

> "Now morn, wi' bonny purpie smiles,
> Kisses the air-cock o' St. Giles;
> Rakin their een, the servant lasses
> Early begin their lies and clashes," etc.

[3] e.g. *Summer*:

> "Swarming they pour, green, speckled, yellow, grey,
> Black, azure, brown, more than the assisted eye
> Of poring virtuoso can discern."

Changed in the 1744 edition to

> "Swarming they pour, of all the varied hues
> Their beauty-beaming parent can disclose."
>
> *Summer*, 247-248.

Even the artificial verse of the Middle Scots Makars may be called to witness, however remote real life appears to be from the conventions of the Rose, the medieval litanies of love, or the formalities of fifteenth century court poets. We do not look for Nature's colours in the gold and enamel of their rhetorical verse, in rivers

> " Of balmy liquour, cristallyne of hew," [1]

or in nightingales, with 'angel feathers' shining as the peacock's, singing their 'sugared notes,' or in sunrise described as the 'upspringing' of

> " the goldyn candill matutyne,
> With clere depurit bemes cristallyne." [2]

Closer acquaintance, however, will correct this estimate.

It may seem strange that in Sir David Lyndsay, the last and most modern of the 'Middle' Scots, this quality of intimacy is less marked than in his predecessors. He is so conscious of the formalism of the Chaucerian tradition that he cannot avoid being formal; and so zealous in polemic and so ready to preach to a foolish generation that he gives himself few opportunities of free enjoyment, and, when he finds them, never uses them to the full. His best work *The Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* supplies some hints of this intimate power; yet it is hard to recall in that long

[1] Dunbar, *S.T.S.*, ii. 174. [2] *ib.*, *The Golden Targe.*

play, or in any of his poems, a single character or episode which is self-explained and real. The rough folk of the interludes are mere vulgar voices; and the description of "Pedder Coffeis" (if it be his), which would have given Henryson or Dunbar his opportunity, is but a tattered sketch.

The medievalist Douglas is more generous. Such things as the tedious geography in the 'voyage' in the *Palice of Honour* are no more than the 'catalogue' pictures of earlier days, but there are suggestions of a crisper and more direct art, as in the passage describing the halt in the pleasant plain amid cedar trees at the foot of a green mountain, or in the Prologues to his *Virgil*, where he breaks away from his task in almost desperate contrariness to give a picture of a Lothian countryside in Spring or a winter day in old Edinburgh. Take, for example, these lines—

"The dowy dichis war all donk and wait,
The law vaille flodderit all wyth spait,
The plane stretis and every hie way
Full of fluschis, doubbis, myre, and clay. . . .
The wynd maid wayfe the reid weyd on the dyk,
Bedovin in donkis deyp was every syk;
Our craggis, and the front of rochis seyre,
Hang gret isch schoklis lang as ony spere;
The grund stude barrand, widderit, dosk, and gray. . .
Smal byrdis, flokand throw thik ronnis thrang,
In chyrmyng and with cheping changit thair sang,
Sekand hidlis and hirnys thaim to hyde

Fra feirful thudis of the tempestuus tyde.
The wattir lynnis routtis, and every lynde
Quhyslyt and brayt of the swouchand wynde "[1]—

vivid in detail, even to the red weed swaying in the wind, and strong in their cumulative effect. As we read on, we see that this realism is neither woven in nor embroidered, but is the very warp of the literary fabric.

" Repaterit weill, and by the chymnay beykyt,
At evin be tyme dovne a bed I me streikit,
Warpit my heid, kest on claythis thrinfauld,
For till expell the perrellus peirsand cauld.
I crocit me, syne bownit for to sleip" [2]—

but fitfully, with the moonlight streaming in, the screeching of an owl nearby, and the 'clacking' of wildgeese as they fly over the city. Later, he tells us—

" Fast by my chalmir, in heych wysnit treis,
The soir gled quhislis loud wyth mony ane pew,
Quhairby the day was dawin weil I knew;
Bad beit the fyire, and the candill alycht,
Syne blissit me, and, in my wedis dycht
Ane schot wyndo vnschet a lytill on char,
Persawit the morning bla, wan, and har,
Wyth cloudy gum and rak ourquhelmyt the air,
The soul3e stythlie, hasart, rowch, and hair,
Branchis brattlyng, and blayknit schew the brays,
With hyrstis harsk of waggand wyndilstrays;
The dew droppis congelyt on stibyll and rynd,
And scharp hailstanis, mortfundit of kynd,
Hoppand on the thak and on the causay by.
The schot I clossit and drew inwart in hy,
Chiverand for cauld, the sessoun was so snell." [3]

[1] Prologue vii. (Small, iii. 75-76). [2] *ib.* 77. [3] *ib.* 78.

Thus confined indoors, and taking thought of his unfinished translation, he sets to work on the seventh book; and the reader, 'repaterit weill' with this domestic realism, passes on to the high matters of Turnus and Aeneas. The interest of this Prologue lies not so much in the literary ingenuity[1] as in the revelation of the intimate and simple in the solemn places of scholarship. The poet turns to a real world to refresh and steady his eye for his next flight. That 'indisputable air of truth' of which Carlyle speaks is so easily lost in the ceremonious tale of gods and heroes. If some of the other Prologues are critical or 'artificial,' they too have a tonic purpose of contrast like those which are directly pictorial. We feel that we are as far from Troy when he gossips of Caxton or makes heavy 'sport' in his eighth Prologue, and that we are always within cry of the lodging of the garrulous Provost of St. Giles.

Dunbar gives like testimony. Critics in calling him the 'Scottish Chaucer' and the 'Scottish Skelton' hint at his formal discipleship, in his Chaucerian allegory and language and his Skeltonic variety of verse, to the neglect of certain stronger likenesses in the directness or realistic fulness of their art. There are, of course, differences, always in favour of the "maister dere," but the intimacy

[1] And in the echo of Henryson's opening lines of the *Testament of Cresseid.*

is there, and it is the Scot's own. There is the tale of "gay ladies in a grene arbeir,"[1] where the persons and conversation are as real to us as to Dunbar's first readers, though in their truthfulness a little more scabrous to us than to that age. There is the *Flyting* with Kennedy, where by the sheer heaping up of personalities he achieves a portrait; and there are *The Tidings from the Session*, *The Dance of the Sevin Deidlie Synnis*, *The Turnament*, and others—all showing the same direct manner, and all working up the picture by a climax of detail. So persistent is this habit of imposing word upon word and epithet on epithet, that it appears even in the most artificial verse of Dunbar and his fellow poets. In such a piece as the following the recurrences and rhymes, though individually vague or even frivolous, win for the poem, by their united rush, some measure of respect.

"Haile, sterne superne! Haile in eterne,
In Goddis sicht to schyne!
Lucerne in derne, for to discerne
Be glory and grace devyne;
Hodiern, modern, sempitern,
Angelicall regyne!
Our tern inferne for to dispern,
Helpe rialest rosyne."[2]

Should research discover that these lines, and others of similar structure, like Henryson's *Prayer*

[1] *The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo.*
[2] *An Ballat of Our Lady*, 1-8.

for the Pest, are a Scottish borrowing from some medieval *Ave*, we shall not be deprived of the interesting fact that in this form the Scot found something that suited his idiosyncrasy.

Still earlier, there is Henryson, the greatest of the Makars, and most truly the 'Scottish Chaucer,' if the catch-title be worth the keeping; and before him, at the beginnings of Scottish literature, the Archdeacon of Aberdeen; and, between and after these, minors willing to add to the evidence. We must leave the *Fables*, with their *vie intime* of the Town Mouse and Chanticleer, and Sprutok and Pertok, and their picaresque tales of Reynard and Wolf Waitskaith, and the *Testament's* picture of the leper Cresseid, and the story of Orpheus's sad journey; and we must pass by the *Brus*, bringing with us the conviction that in the crowded movement of the poem—its processional of shining shields and basnets, "browdyn baneris," "pennons upon spears"—we have more than a hint of the art of the later poet of Scottish chivalry.

An exhaustive survey of all this material would show that the completed effect of the piling up of details is one of movement, suggesting the action of a concerted dance or the canter of a squadron. We have gone astray if we call this art merely meticulous, a pedant's or cataloguer's vanity in words, as some foolish persons have inclined to

make charge against the 'antiquary' Scott. The whole is not always lost in the parts: it is not a compilation impressive only because it is greater than any of its contributing elements, but often single in result, and above all things lively. For which reason our earlier epithet of 'Dutch' must be understood 'with a difference,' if we incline to think only of the careful brushwork of every tile and pot-lid in an interior. The verse-forms of both popular and artificial Scots poetry aid this purpose of movement—in the stanzas of the *Cherrie and the Slae*, in *Philotus*, in some of Douglas's Prologues, in *Christis Kirk* and *Peblis to the Play*, in much of Burns. In the older popular verse, partly cast in the mould of the alliterative romance, as well as in the seventeenth and eighteenth century copies, the details catch each other up like dancers in a morris.

"Than thai come to the tounis end
Withouttin moir delai,
He befoir, and scho befoir,
To see quha wes maist gay.
All that lukit thame upon
Leuche fast at thair array;
Sum said that thay were mercat folk,
Sum said the Quene of May
Wes cumit
To Peblis to the play."

Thus in *Peblis to the Play*; so too in *Christis Kirk*—

"To dans thir damysellis thame dicht,
Thir lassis licht of laitis,

Thair gluvis wes of the raffel rycht,
Thair schone wes of the straitis;
Thair kirtillis wes of lynkome licht,
Weill prest with mony plaitis.
Thay wer so nys quhen men thame nicht,
Thay squeilit lyk ony gaitis
So lowd
At Chrystis Kirk of the Grene that day."

There, surely, the swish of the skirt, the fling and bob of rustic festivity! Just as in one of the stanzas of the *Buke of the Howlat* the author suggests in his elaborate account of the four and twenty musical instruments an orchestral effect, dying away in the short lines of the finale.[1] So, too, in the lively tale of *Sym and his Brudir* and in *Colkelbie's Sow* the appeal to the reader is in like terms—the familiar *crescendo* of frolic, rush, and noise. In the former, when the hubbub is over, the poet naïvely makes confession of his restless mood—

"He endis the story with harme forlorne;
The nolt begowth till skatter,
The ky ran startling to the corne."

There is the same motive in the recital of the 'tocher-gud' in the *Wowing of Jok and Jynny*, and in the husbandman's long tale of woe in the *Wyf of Auchtirmuchty*, where the climax is aided,

[1] We may compare this with the less effective musical passage in Douglas's *Palice of Honour*, or even with Henryson's happier erudition in his *Orpheus*, and explain the failure, in Douglas's case at least, as a result of the allegorical setting.

as more familiarly in the Ballads, by an ingenious repetition of phrase.[1]

It is this sense of movement which has done something to save the Scot's zeal in observation from becoming merely antiquarian and tiresome. It achieves in some of the best examples that higher realism in which R. L. Stevenson found "the sentiment assimilating the facts of natural congruity,"[2] not what is suggested only by the sheer force of numbers. The old saw comes to mind, "An artist should learn his anatomy and forget it"; or as one has said, "Anatomy, indispensable to the artist, becomes a source of all error if we forget that it is inertia."[3] Criticism has concerned itself too exclusively with these inert elements in Scottish poetry. It has talked much of the 'sense of colour' and the 'feeling for nature,' but has gone no further than to make an inventory of the references, or to theorize very airily on the Celtic origin of these likings, or, with Sydney Smith and Russell Lowell, to discover in this uncouth verse the early

[1] As in the ninth stanza—

"Than to the kyrn that he did stoure
And jwmlit at it quhill he swatt:
Quhen he had jwmlit a full lang houre,
The sorrow crap of butter he gatt.
Albeit na butter he could gett
Yit he was cummerit with the kyrne
And syne he het the milk our hett,
And sorrow spark of it wald ȝyrne."

[2] From an unpublished letter, described and reproduced in part in Maggs Bros.' *Catalogue*, No. 298 (Oct. 1912).

[3] *À propos* of the Rodin-Gsell *causeries* on Art.

hints of what they might have agreed to call the tedious arithmetic of the Scottish mind.

The Scottish Muse has, however, another mood. Though she has loved reality, sometimes to maudlin affection for the commonplace, she has loved not less the airier pleasure to be found in the confusion of the senses, in the fun of things thrown topsyturvy, in the horns of elfland and the voices of the mountains. It is a strange union of opposites, alien as Hotspur and Glendower; not to be explained as if this liking for "skimble-skamble stuff"[1] were derived from the very exuberance of the poets' realism by an inevitable reaction, or were a defect of its quality, or a sort of saturnalian indulgence to the slaves of observation. The opinion, so popular with Renan's and Matthew Arnold's generation, that this whimsical delight is a Celtic heritage may or may not be true, but the attempt to find a source is useful as a reminder that this characteristic is not a mere accident, or wantoning, no matter how much of its extravagance may be a direct protest against the prose of experience. It goes better with our knowledge of Scottish character and history to accept the antagonism as real and necessary. The Scot is not a quarrelsome man, but he has a fine sense of the value of provocation, and in the clash of things and words has often found a spiritual

[1] *I Hen. IV.* III. i. 154; taken in the fullest sense.

tonic. Does any other man combine so strangely the severe and tender in his character, or forgo the victory of the most relentless logic at the sudden bidding of sentiment or superstition? Does literature anywhere, of this small compass, show such a mixture of contraries as his in outlook, subject, and method; real life and romance, every-day fact and the supernatural, things holy and things profane, gentle and simple, convention and "cantrip," thistles and thistledown? We see this constitutional liking for contrasts in the old fun of the *flyting*, so popular in the North, in which the pitting of East against West, Angle against Gael, commended itself less for the roughness and obscenity which an obscene taste fostered than for the sheer exhilaration of conflict. We are least concerned here with the plainest of all devices in contrariety, that of simply reversing experience, as when Swift and Voltaire make great things small and small things great; for once the convention is stated and understood, everything that follows is matter-of-fact. There is more in the Scottish antithesis of the real and fantastic than is to be explained by the familiar rules of rhetoric. The sudden jostling of contraries seems to preclude any relationship by literary suggestion. The one invades the other without warning. They are the 'polar twins'[1] of the Scottish Muse.

[1] *Stevensoniana*, p. 21.

We have a modern and familiar illustration of this bizarrerie in Byron's *Don Juan*. Everybody knows the hymn to Greek liberty, but not everybody, perhaps, nowadays, its setting in the poem. In the description of the poet in Juan's suite, we are told—

> "In France, for instance, he could write a chanson;
> In England a six canto quarto tale;
> In Spain, he'd make a ballad or romance on
> The last war—much the same in Portugal;
> In Germany, the Pegasus he'd prance on
> Would be old Goethe's (see what says De Staël);
> In Italy he'd ape the 'Trecentisti';
> In Greece he'd sing some sort of hymn like this t'ye." [1]

On the heels of these gibes and the flippant "this t'ye" follow the familiar lines on the Isles of Greece, till, at the height of patriotic fervour and lyrical beauty, which still count for something to Byron's faded reputation, the other Byron breaks in, in contrary mood—

> "Thus sung, or would, or could, or should have sung
> The modern Greek, in tolerable verse," etc.

Let us avoid the irrelevance that Byron is here finding a place for a copy of verses, as Pope did for his 'Character of Addison'; or, as Jeffrey appears to have thought, that he is merely throwing his "cold-blooded ribaldry" into stronger relief by his smooth heroics; or, with some solemn persons, that he is only showing us his poet's weakness

[1] *Don Juan*, canto iii.

and the degenerate taste he served. It is frivolous to look for a deep purpose in this conjunction of opposite moods, especially in a poet whom the critics have singled out as 'daemonic.' These moods are individual and alien, "dremis or dotage in the monis cruik,"[1] which interrupt the prose of life as dreams will, in Puck's own way, and at his own time.

Historians and critics of Scottish literature have made scant allowance, if any, for these interruptions in the plain tale of experience, even though the poets themselves have given not a few hints of surprise at their own change of mood and have at times attempted an explanation. The author of *Lichtounis Dreme* ends his whimsical story by saying—

> "As wiffis commandis, this dreme I will conclude;
> God and the rude mot turn it all to gud!
> Gar fill the cop, for thir auld carlingis clames
> That gentill aill is oft the caus of dremes;"

just as Burns delicately ascribes Tam's adventure "wi' warlocks in the mirk," or the picturesque harangue to Auld Cloots, to the machinations of the bourgeois fairy, John Barleycorn;[2] or as Sir John Redgauntlet tells Steenie it were better to lay the "haill dirdum" on 'Major Weir' and say

[1] G. Douglas, *Aen.* vi. Prol.

[2] Cf. Burns's account of the Alloway Kirk stories (Letter to F. Grose, in Chambers, iii. 220), especially of the shepherd boy whisked off to Bordeaux. Cf. also Hogg's *Witch of Fife*.

nothing about the dream in the wood of Pitmurkie, as he "had taken ower muckle brandy to be very certain about onything."[1] We are dull indeed if we do not see in this reference to the contrast and in its explanation a quizzing of those prosaic and precise persons who must have that realism which presents everything as sober fact, within an ell of their noses. The poets seem to say: 'Here is fantasy strange enough; if you, drunkard of facts, must explain it, do so in the only way open to you, or to any "auld carlin." Be satisfied, if you think it is we who are drunk. As for us, let the contrast be unexplained, and let us make merry in this clash of strange worlds and moods.' It is beside the point to hint at or deny John Barleycorn's aid to the poetic imagination, and unnecessary to consider the ingenious view of a recent writer on Celtic literature, that bardic intemperance is not the satisfying of a sordid appetite but proof of the "cravings for the illusion of an unreal world."[2]

We have probably lost much of the evidence of this delight in the grotesque and uncanny, for these things are not the decorous tasks of copyists or of poets printing for posterity. Yet enough remains. It is interesting, for example, to note that when

[1] *Redgauntlet*, Letter xi.

[2] *The Literature of the Scottish Gael*, by the Rev. Donald Maclean, 1912, p. 50.

each of the greater Middle Scots Makars doffs the ceremonial robes required by the courtly Muse and takes his ease in his own inn, he turns to alliterative burlesque and the wonderland of Gog Magog and the fairies. Lyndsay reminds us that he cheered his young master the prince, when he was 'sorye,' with the prophecies of Thomas the Rhymer and Merlin and such 'pleasant stories' as the *Red Etin* and the *Gyre Carling*[1]—the last sheer skimble-skamble, telling of Blasour's love for a witch who defied his army of moles and beat him badly, and, when the King of Faery with his elves and all the dogs from Dunbar to Dunblane and all the tykes of Tervey laid siege to her tower, changed herself into a sow and went "gruntling our the Greik Sie"; of her marriage to Mahoun, and of Scotland's distress, so that the cocks of Cramond ceased to crow and the hens of Haddington to lay. The tale of King Berdok is better nonsense. This "great King of Babylon," who in summer dwelt on a "bowkaill stock" (cabbage runt) and in winter retired for warmth to a cockle-shell, had wooed for seven years Mayok, "the golk of Maryland," who was "but yeiris thre." He set out to ravish this "bony bird," who, though she had but one eye, was loved by him, "for hir foirfute was langer than hir heill." He found her milking her mother's cows, and cast her into a creel on his

[1] *The Dreme*, ed. Laing, i., p. 2.

back. When he returned, his burden was but a "howlat nest, full of skait birdis:" so he wept, and ran back for his love. But in vain, for the King of Faery was out with his many, and Berdok hid himself within a kiln. On this refuge the King, with the aid of the Kings of the Picts and of Portugal, Naples, and Strathnaver, trained his guns and showered bullets of dough. Jupiter invoked father Saturn to save the amorous Berdok by transforming him to a toad, but Mercury gave him the shape of a bracken bush.

> "And quhen thay saw the buss waig to and fra,
> Thay trowd it wes ane gaist, and thay to ga."

Lichtoun, at one stage of his dream-journey, sails in a barge of draff to Paradise, "the place where Adam was," and, as he enters the port, sees Enoch and Eli

> "Sittand, on Yule euin, in ane fresch grene schaw,
> Rostand straberries at ane fyre of snaw;"

and later, at the blowing of an 'elrich horne,' beholds, besides other 'ferlies,' three white whales, tied by grasshoppers' hairs in a meadow. Of the ghost of Lord Fergus, which another anonymous writer seeks to lay with extravagant ritual, it is said that—

> "It stall Goddis quhittill;
> It stall fra peteous Abrahame
> Ane quhorle and ane quhum quhame;

It stall fra the carle of the mone
Ane pair of awld yrn schone;
It ran to Pencaitlane
And wirreit ane awld chaplane."

In the *Littill Interlud*, ascribed to Dunbar, the dwarf sketches his giant grandsire Gog Magog, who, when he danced, made the world 'schog,' and

"wald upoun his tais up stand
And tak the starnis doun with his hand,
And set thame in a gold garland
Aboif his wyvis hair." [1]

And in Dunbar's short fantasy of *Kynd Kittok* we have the story of a gay wife who, having died of thirst and taken the highway to heaven, wandered by an 'elriche well,' where she met a newt riding on a snail,

"And cryit, 'Ourtane, fallow, haill!'
And raid ane inche behind the taill,
Till it wes neir evin;"

of the tedium of her heavenly task as Our Lady's henwife; and of her escape to enjoy once more the lower delights of inn-keeping. When the poet concludes, wantonly—

"Frendis, I pray you hertfully,
Git ye be thirsty or dry,
Drink with my guddame, as ye ga by,
Anys for my saik,"

we seem to catch the sentiment, even the turn of phrase, of Burns's *Address to the Deil*. Of

[1] Cf. Byron's *Vision of Judgment*, st. 2, for another astronomical hyperbole.

'ugsum horribilities' and of the doings of sprites like Inflar Tasy and Belly Bassy in *Sir John Rowll's Cursing*, there are examples enough; so too of that gentler topsyturvy humour, with its nursery-note, as in the 'Dreg-song' and 'When I was a wee thing' preserved for us in Herd's MS.[1] With these and many other passages in mind, we see that the Scottish Muse, expert as she is in life's realities, has, like Burns's 'douce honest woman,' her moments when she hears the rustling of strange things "thro' the bourtrees comin'." "The Lord guide us," we may say with Mistress Baby in the *Pirate*,[2] "what kind of a country of guisards and gyre-carlines is this!"

The consideration of this second element and of its contrasted character has generally been narrowed down to argument about its Celtic origin. The problem does not press on us as it did upon Renan and Matthew Arnold, and the latter's plea for the Celt is, in spite of its abiding elegance of exposition, not so convincing as it was, even to the most partisan. While we are willing to make some allowance for the influence of locality and the mixing of races, and to find Scottish instance for the Irish commonplace about Norman settlers *ipsis Hibernis hiberniores*, we must take account of certain stubborn facts. In the first place, it is hard

[1] ed. 1904, pp. 190 and 188.
[2] Chapter vi.

to find traces of this whimsical quality in the extant literature of the Scottish Gael, in the book of the Dean of Lismore, in the Ossianic *corpus*, or in the oral traditions collected by Campbell of Islay. There we have persistent evidence of a lively talent for observation and of some cunning in obtaining general effects by the device of massing details; and in many passages which cannot be so described —where the mists of Morven often descend most provokingly upon the poet—the characteristic Celtic touch is merely impressionist, not shirking the use of detail, either directly or fantastically, but omitting what is of lesser importance and leaving the reader to complete the picture. Here is a short Finn poem, for illustration—

> "A tale here for you: oxen lowing, winter's snowing, summer's passing; wind from the North, high and cold, low the sun and short his course, wildly tossing the wave of the sea. The fern burns deep red. Men wrap themselves closely. The wild goose raises her wonted cry; cold seizes the wing of the bird; 'tis the season of ice; sad my tale!" [1]

In the second place, we must not forget that Old English literature, especially of the 'Riddle' kind, is streaked with this vein; and thirdly, that the long-continuing antagonism of racial elements and areas down to a late period makes against a theory of ready absorption, and more clearly in the North

[1] Nutt, *Ossian and the Ossianic Literature*, 1899, p. 9.

than in Wales. Even in the case of the latter we have grown suspicious of Arnold's conclusions. His argument means little more than this: given one quality which is to all appearance unlike another admittedly characteristic of a people, it may, must, and does come from an outside source; given a spiritual lightness and vivacity in the dull, heavy, practical genius of Teutonic England, it must have come from the Celts. We ask for proof; indeed, we decline to think it capable of proof, when we are told that the richest gifts are a sense of colour, an appreciation of natural effects, and other aptitudes, all of which are the ordinary talents and tools in the realist's workshop.

Were any distinctions in this general denial of Celtic indebtedness worth making in this connexion, we might be tempted to say that the Welsh evidence, on which current opinion mainly rests, is less convincing than that of the Scottish Gaelic, and that the latter only commends itself when it shows some direct touch with Irish Gaelic. The plausible affiliation with Cymric fancy, as illustrated in the tale of *Kilhwch and Olwen* in the *Mabinogion*, discloses nothing more than the familiar device of hyperbole. Drem can see the gnat rising with the sun in far-off Cornwall [1] and Clust hears the ant fifty miles off rustling from her nest.[2] When the bard tells us that Gwevyl in his sad moods "let

[1] ed. Nutt, p. 110. [2] *ib.*, p. 113.

one of his lips drop below his waist, while he turned up the other like a cap upon his head,"[1] and that Hornyhead was wont "to go upon his head to save his feet," like "a rolling stone upon the floor of the court,"[2] we smoke an old jest which involves no bardic mystery. In such passages there is little, if any, parodic intention. In Irish, on the other hand, the evidence is not so negative, even if we have to confine ourselves to the rather exceptional *Vision of MacConglinne*.[3] Description like that in the *Feast of Bricriu* of Cuchulainn's straining to heave the feast-house to its upright position is only hyperbolic. "He tried to lift the house at a tug and failed. A distortion thereupon got hold of him, whilst a drop of blood was at the root of each single hair, and he absorbed his hair into his head, so that, looked on from above, his dark-yellow curls seemed as if they had been shorn by scissors: and, taking upon him the motion of a mill-stone, he strained himself till a warrior's foot could find room between each pair of ribs."[4] The fun of Guzzledom—of Fluxy, son of Elcab the Fearless, from the Fairy-knoll of Eating,[5] and of Bacon-lad, son of Butter-lad, son of Lard, with his leggings of pot-meat and tunic of corned beef, and his steed of bacon with its

[1] ed. Nutt, p. 112. [2] *ib.*, p. 104. [3] ed. Meyer, 1892.
[4] *The Feast of Bricriu*, transl. by George Henderson, Irish Texts Society, ii. p. 33.
[5] *Vision of MacConglinne*, p. 74.

four legs of custard [1]—is nothing but a straightforward tale of Cockayne. Once the premisses are admitted, we know what to expect. There is little or nothing of the wantonness of grotesque, the curious turns and contradictions and general chaos of sense, all expressed within narrow limits. It has been pointed out, in reference to the Irish influence on Welsh story-telling, that the peculiar Celtic 'note' consists in the "vivid contrast between the realism of the introductory framework" of certain pieces and the "fantastic gorgeousness" of dream-passages interpolated.[2] When we turn to the tale which suggested this comment we find that it has no bearing on our present purpose. Rhonabwy falls asleep and dreams that "he journeyed and heard a mighty noise, the like whereof heard he never before; and looking behind him, he beheld a youth with yellow curling hair, and with his beard newly trimmed, mounted on a chestnut horse, whereof the legs were grey from the top of the forelegs, and from the bend of the hind legs downwards. And the rider wore a coat of yellow satin sewn with green silk, and on his thigh was a gold-hilted sword, with a scabbard of new leather of Cordova, belted with the skin of the deer, and clasped with gold. And over this was a scarf of yellow satin wrought with green silk, the borders whereof were likewise green. And the green of

[1] *ib.*, p. 88. [2] *Mabinogion*, ed. Nutt, pp. 346-7.

the caparison of the horse, and of his rider, was as green as the leaves of the fir-tree, and the yellow was as yellow as the blossom of the broom"[1]—and so on, in sober recital of a thousand details. It is a very methodical knight this Rhonabwy, dreaming and waking; and we miss the promised contrasts, such as come to us in the Vision of a poet of a less golden age, when, sitting by the ingle-cheek, "fill'd wi' hoast-provoking smeek," and hearing

> "the restless rattons squeak
> About the riggin,"

he saw the cottage door open to the "outlandish hizzie" from dreamland.[2]

It may be that the lowland Muse has learnt something from the Muse of Erscherie in her Galloway and Ayrshire haunts, as neighbours will; but, as neighbourhood often provokes criticism, it might not be too fantastic on our part, were the borrowing to be taken for granted, to see in the more complicated grotesques of the borrower an element of conscious parody rather than a family tradition. If it be hard to admit borrowing in the more patent habit of language,[3] it becomes a

[1] *Mabinogion, u.s.*, p. 149. [2] Burns, *The Vision.*

[3] As, with Sir James Murray, that the Scot's roundabout way of stating a question is a Gaelic fashion; or, with others, that the Ulsterman's emphasis of reply ("Dud you do it?"—"I dud") discloses association with a people who have no "Yes" in their language. And if, on the other hand, it be beyond doubt that the initial 'f' for 'hw' or 'wh' in the dialects of Aberdeen and

hopeless task in the analysis of literary faculty. Even if any evidence were available to those on whom the onus of proof at present rests, we should be loath to surrender the opinion that opposites and contrasts in an individual or literature are, more often than not, original and constitutional in that individual or literature, and that neither of the contraries may be imposed from without. To separate the contrasts in character, as Scott, with the licence of the novelist and of his age, has done in his chapters on Saxon and Norman, or Arnold in his Essay, is to place the obverse of a coin in one bag and the reverse in another.

It may not appear unreasonable to lay this emphasis on the contrariety in northern literary mood, especially as certain conditions, or accidents, in the later national development, to be glanced at later,[1] too readily obscure the second element and leave the Muse the narrower reputation of being painfully concerned with the Annals of the Five Senses. Even if it be said that much of this skimble-skamble is but the stuff of dreams which engages the irresponsible hours of the slowest minds, or if the humorous excuses of Lichtoun, and Burns himself, be taken literally, it would be worth noting that the Scot, the methodical, level-

of a portion of County Wexford, comes from contact with the Gael, we do not forget the special 'borderland' circumstances of the Highland Line and the English Pale.

[1] See Chapter ii.

headed, self-conscious creature of popular tradition, has so far forgotten his conventional manner as to make confession of these disordered moments. For the 'douce' travesty which stands for the Scot with the general *never* says as much as he thinks: he is a mute philosopher on warlocks, and as calm as a country Sabbath-morn on the cantrips of his mind.[1] But he is not the Scot who steps forth self-confessed in the Makars old and new, despite the accidents or 'thwarts' of history which stayed, or appear to stay, the freer play of his fancy.

This mixing of contraries—'intermingledons,' to recall Burns's word[2]—helps to explain the presence of certain qualities which have come to be considered as characteristic of Scottish literature. In the first place, it throws some light on that talent for the picturesque so generally allowed to northern writers. And what is the picturesque, in spite of the cheapening of the term in the market-place, but the quality which, as Hazlitt tells us,[3] "depends chiefly on the principle of discrimination and contrast" and "runs imperceptibly into the fantastical and grotesque"? In other words, in its exercise and effect it does not show mere sensitiveness to fact, with or without the art of intensifying

[1] He was even a Scot (the poet Campbell) who thought that Burns was "the most un-Scotch-like of Scotchmen," because he was so free in confession to the world.

[2] See his letter to Mrs. Dunlop, 22nd August, 1792.

[3] *Table Talk*, 1819, pp. 448-449.

and completing the impression by the heaping-up of details. Scottish literature is not so placid. If we neglect its more striking or astonishing extravagances, we have to account for that prevailing sense of movement, that energy and variety, call it what we like, that stirs even its most narrative mood. If a formula is to be found it must explain this strange combination of things unlike, of things seen in an everyday world and things which, like the elf-queen herself, neither earth nor heaven will claim. This mingling, even of the most eccentric kind, is an indication to us that the Scot, in that medieval fashion which takes all things as granted, is at his ease in both 'rooms of life,' and turns to fun, and even profanity, with no misgivings. For Scottish literature is more medieval in habit than criticism has suspected, and owes some part of its picturesque strength to this freedom in passing from one mood to another. It takes some people more time than they can spare to see the absolute propriety of a gargoyle's grinning at the elbow of a kneeling saint.[1]

In the second place, the recognition of these

[1] In an article in the *Times*, of 10th Dec., 1912, on the first exhibition of the Society of Humorous Art in London, the writer finds evidence of the weakness of contemporary pictorial fun in the work of Charles Keene, who "will often place an incongruously beautiful and serious landscape behind two low-comedy figures." And he had no Scottish blood to excuse the folly! 'Scientific' criticism may have something to say about his having learned to play the bagpipes so well.

opposites must modify some popular views, even among Scotsmen, about the element of humour in Scottish literature—humour in its most inclusive sense, not mere "wut" (of the "jocose" kind) or rough fun. We may assent to Lamb's tale of "imperfect sympathy" with the Caledonian whose "Minerva is born in panoply," whose ideas "do not grow," who "never hints or suggests anything, but unlades his stock of ideas in perfect order and completeness." We know that Scot as well as they did at the India House, though even he has been misjudged a little. We have met him in railway carriages and at foreign Universities, but rarely in northern writing, except in the polemical tracts of the seventeenth century or other documents as unliterary in pretence. In *that* Scot there is, in Lamb's phrase, "no borderland within." He dwells far from Huntlie Bank, where we shall find our poet, if *he* be not on seven years' leave in the land of mystery. If logic keeps this solemn person from being caught in the druid's mist, it denies him the secrets of humour and pathos, and an understanding companionship with the poets he is always ready to praise.

In the third place, we seem to find some connexion between this double mood and the easy passing in Scottish literature between the natural and supernatural, as if in challenge to the traditional exclusiveness of certain subjects, each within

its own caste. Here, again, we call to mind the preaching and arguing Scot of the seventeenth century, who placed impossible barriers to the poet's free passage from the one to the other ; and the neo-classical Scot of the eighteenth century, who, while admitting that on occasion the supernatural and natural might have, as it were, a drawing-room introduction, had no desire to promote their closer acquaintance. Neither of these attitudes represents the true feeling of Scottish literature, which at all periods has shown a readiness not only to accept the contrary moods more or less on equal terms, but to make the one blend imperceptibly into the other. Coleridge has shown this as convincingly as any English writer, not so much by direct critical argument as by the interwoven magic and reality of his verse. His gentle association of the two elements, so unlike the cumbrous coupling by many of his 'romantic' contemporaries, was one of his great aids to the poetic enlightenment of the nineteenth century. We find a like quality in a northern poet of his time, the Ettrick Shepherd ; but in him its interest is less individual. We strike, as it were, upon a vein, which had been worked before and would be later. Hogg, with pardonable egotism, when comparing himself with Scott, claimed that he was "king of the mountain and fairy school," and we cannot, with the elfin music of *Kilmeny* in

our ears, dispute the self-appreciation, even though compelled to admit that in the Shepherd's work there is so much of the local and of the earth earthy. That the Hogg of this verse, sticky with the mud of Mitchelslacks, the writer of veterinary prose on *Diseases of Sheep*, should be a Pilgrim to the Sun and hold fairyland in fee has almost turned some critics to a belief in miracles, to the forgetting of all the inspired moments which have come to simple folk from Caedmon's days to ours. The true miracle, if so must be the word, of the Shepherd's art is the way in which we pass without a hint of change from the land of real men and women to that other, as we might do from one parish to another on an afternoon's walk. His lost Kilmeny returns as unexpectedly, but as gently, as she went. Like his lark, she is of earth and sky. There is no wrench, no lumbering change of scenery when the stage harlequin has waved his wand.

"When many a day had come and fled,
When grief grew calm and hope was dead,
When mass for Kilmeny's soul had been sung,
When the beadsmen had prayed and the dead-bell rung,
Late, late in a gloamin, when all was still,
When the fringe was red on the westlin' hill,
The wood was sere, the moon i' the wane,
The reek o' the cot hung over the plain
Like a little wee cloud in the world its lane;
When the ingle lowed with an eiry leme,
Late, late in the gloamin Kilmeny came hame."

The cottage calm is unbroken ; there are no strange lights in the west at this home-coming. Kilmeny floats into her mother's ken; returns to her a real child, to be asked in natural and kindly curiosity about her truant doings and the gift of her skirt of lily sheen and her bonny snood. Again in the poem, after the tale of her fairy-life is told, and she has 'raiked' the lonely glen and tamed beast and bird by her beauty and innocence,

> " There laid her down on the leaves so green,
> And Kilmeny on earth was never mair seen ! "

Hogg guides us back to *Tamlane*, once popular in his Ettrick Forest, and *Thomas Rymer*, and others, both Border ballad and Makars' verse. It is of no moment what any one of these may owe to predecessors, for the most deliberate *pastiche* is testimony to this sensitiveness [1] to the twilight of earth and fairyland. Down to our own day there has been continuous witness, in all types of the literary Scot. We see the elements combined in the work of the greatest of the moderns, as humdrum Edinburgh lawyers saw it in their neighbour 'Sprite' and Samoans in their loved Tusitala. We see it in one who, though scholar, researcher, bibliographer—as pleased to be Gifford lecturer as Stevenson would have been to be Professor of Constitutional History—is remembered as our chief Fairy-book maker. Of him the creator of Peter

[1] On the dulling of this, see Chapter ii.

Pan has said: "Mr. Lang was as Scotch as peat.... He thought Mr. Lang always puzzled the Sassenach a little. That was one of the duties of the Scot. He was so prodigal of his showers of gold and so wayward. There was a touch of the elf about him. A 'touch' hardly seemed quite right, because one could never touch him—he was too elusive for that. The same could be said of Stevenson. No doubt if Scotland were searched long enough it would be found that there were others. It was perhaps a Scottish quality."[1] And what say the Auld Lichts to the capers of this Peter and his whimsical friends within hearing of the kirk-session of Thrums?

So it has fallen out with Scottish literature, as Burns tells us it fell out with his art, that it has been cared for by fairies, and brownies, and witches, and warlocks, and spunkies, and kelpies—"and other trumpery," he adds,[2] with a Scot's privilege and a Scottish meaning. So, too, this literature has satisfied that "first condition of the poetic way of seeing and presenting things" which is, in Pater's phrase, "particularisation" and "the delight in concrete definition."[3] Contraries indeed, but as warp and woof.

[1] *The Times*, 29th Nov., 1912.

[2] Letter to Dr. Moore, 2nd Aug., 1787.

[3] *Appreciations*, p. 231.

CHAPTER II

LETS AND HINDRANCES

A LITERATURE so attracted by the intimacies of life and so fancy-free runs some risk of exaggerating its enthusiasms. As the range is narrowed in times of lesser account, art becomes more emphatic and retrospective, and what was once spontaneous or even occasional in interest is made a badge of 'nationality.' Somehow we feel, as our acquaintance with Scottish literature grows, that the promise of its combined moods is not generously fulfilled, except in a few instances; that by lets and hindrances, partly of its own making, partly the tyranny of circumstance, it has been thrown back upon itself and has become too domestic or irresponsible. It is not difficult to see that, though strong external forces interrupted the development, not a little of the loss was, as it were, the effect of inbreeding. We are not likely to obscure the investigation by discussing these internal conditions before the 'foreign' influences, which may be said to be the first cause of the throwing back. The

effect of the attacks from without was, in general, not so much the intrusion of alien ideas, as the curtailment of opportunities—the cutting off of territory rather than the planting of strange standards on the citadel. The later native habit is directly related to the older. It would have been found in freer conditions, had there been no interference by the 'foreigner'; in its narrower setting it appears to be intensified, or, from another point of view, degenerate.

The Scottish Muse has been charged with three breaches of 'decorum,' each serious enough to damn her higher hopes of Parnassus. She has been called provincial, by which is meant no mere contrast with English or other standards, but a certain frumpishness or village-habit that goes badly with her national pretence. It has been said of her that often in taste and language she shows an unblushing defiance of the gentler graces and the proprieties. She has been blamed for being tediously reminiscent of family matters and neighbour-folk, of living too much in the past and in her own past. Briefly, the indictment is that she is provincial (even parochial), rough-mannered, and antiquarian.

The charge of provincialism recalls a quarrel now a generation old. When Matthew Arnold in his Introduction to a popular anthology of the English Poets made survey from his trigonometric base of

'criticism of life,' he took particular care to check some Scottish miscalculations of Burns's genius. He found much that was reasonable in the general estimate, but he thought the verse has too often the taint of the provincial and local. It "deals perpetually with Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners"—so we are told, four times in one paragraph. If it have "truth of matter and truth of manner," it lacks the "high seriousness," the "accent or the poetic virtue of the highest masters." Ruskin, in the same year,[1] when referring to the fourth stanza of *Death and Dr. Hornbook*, concluded that "for Burns the moon must rise over Cumnock hills"; and Henley, in the calm of a footnote to a famous effort in frankness (1896), held that most of the poems are local, "parochial even," that in *Holy Willie* and the *Holy Fair*, for example, "the circumstances, the manners, the characters, the experience, all are local."[2] Such agreement by three English critics must command respectful consideration, for on all questions as to how the universal appeal of an artist is affected by the parochial and petty, the alien has perhaps the better right to speak. Yet it is strange that they should have found this disturbing element in Burns, who, of all poets, has

[1] *Fiction, Fair and Foul*, iii., in *Nineteenth Century*, Sept., 1880; *Works*, ed. Cook and Wedderburn, xxxiv. 331.

[2] Edition of Burns, iv. 274.

laid hold of the universal, and, in winning the world's favour, has overcome the barrier of dialect. Arnold's position was soon attacked and turned, and it is not necessary to add much to what the late Professor Nichol said in his *Life* of the poet[1] about the critic's confounding of "provincialism in themes and provincialism in thought." If "provincialism" means anything, it is, as our Oxford authority has it, "narrowness of view, thought, or interests, roughness of speech or manners, as distinct from the polish of court or capital." The roughness of speech, that is the dialect, has been condoned, even allowed to be an aid where the curial speech must fail. Of narrowness of view, even Matthew Arnold would have made no complaint. What he appears to hint at is the studied and unflagging realism of Burns's work, the absence of the abstract and of the mist of romance. This is an unexpected misliking on the part of one to whom, both as poet and critic, classicism meant so much. For, as one has laid it down, "Romance . . . there was none in Burns—'tis the sole point, perhaps, at which he was out of touch with the unrenowned generations whose flower and crown he was."[2] His is that classical quality, the perfection of the acquisitive power which misses nothing, feels directly and fully, and, as in the greater of the ancients, attains the absolute by its

[1] 1882. [2] Henley's Essay, *Burns*, iv. 332.

very precision in the real. The moon may rise over Cumnock and cast familiar shadows of Ayrshire lairds and weavers. What of that? If Afton Water were to meander by Parnassus and Alloway Kirk were a temple of the Great God Pan, we should not be one whit less distracted—we might be more—than we are by the transcendent realism of this modern.

But if this be true of Burns, what shall we say of others, and of Scottish literature generally? There, and especially in the later period, in the ingle-pathos and tavern-fun, even amid the most artificial sentimentalism, the free appeal is certainly hampered by 'parochial' claims. There is no denying the fact that the Scot seldom strays far from the village-pump and the familiar gable-ends. Nor is this surprising, when we find the habit of intimacy so engrained in the literary character; nor strange that it should be exaggerated in the special conditions of modern Scotland. A small country, made guardian of its own destinies, runs the risk, by the sheer energy and success of its self-reliance, of finding an ever-growing satisfaction in the things that lie at hand and are familiar. The Scot may be a great wanderer, may accommodate himself readily to new ways, may even be completely endenized in a foreign civilization; but the Scot at home, accepting circumstance with like readiness, busies himself, happily enough, with the tasks of

neighbourhood and gossipry imposed by a rigorous tradition. There is another consideration, savouring a little of paradox, that the exceptional and envied advantages which Scotland has enjoyed from her educational system have been obstacles to her artistic enlargement. It has often been pointed out, in reference to the Scot's unique method of honouring Burns's genius, that the training of the national intellect, even in the humblest classes, has given him a wider public than has fallen to the lot of poets of other peoples. Though it may be said that this would not have availed much had Burns not shown the talent of giving his countrymen just what they liked best, it must not be forgotten that his audience was unusually receptive. This appreciation enhanced the reputation of individual poets and created a currency of song and jest, but it did not extend the range of literary interest. That there were so many practitioners ready for the work brought conviction that the old matters and the old method were still unexhausted; and emulation and neighbourly pride encouraged self-satisfaction. The narrow discipline of this culture hardly allowed even the most daring spirits to venture afield in search of that 'long perspective' which Keats claimed as by right for the poet's exercise. Had Burns's genius not been so great, he too might have been no more than a pleasant annalist of village sentiment. Yet the

completeness of his own triumph has probably done more than we can estimate in confirming his successors, great and small, in their liking for the intimate genre, and, in the changed circumstance of later Scotland, has given the excuse for a literary affectation in verse-making.

If we are asked to point to the more obvious effects of this habit in Scottish literature, we do not hesitate to fix on its patriotic cast and its domesticity. Of the former it is always difficult, if not dangerous to speak. An alien, if he is wise, will not meddle in this matter, however reasonably he may protest that an unprejudiced eye sees better how overstrained enthusiasm stands in the way of a poet's recognition in the commonwealth of great literature. Even the Scot, unsuspected of treason, may feel that academic refinement is here unwelcome ; yet he may go in safety, if he restricts himself to the historical observation, that in the earlier stages of the literature the appeal to national sentiment is always in general terms, and that in the period of high achievement which has been called the "Golden Age of Scottish Poetry" this appeal is almost entirely absent. Though history shows that there was no lack of nationalism of the more generous kind as far back as Scottish literature can go, and no lack of verse-chronicle of the deeds of Roy Robert and other champions, we must remember that in the Scotland of James IV.

national confidence never expressed itself as in Henry V.'s or Elizabeth's England. We do not find such utterance till we come to the time of the *Complaynt of Scotlande*, and then rather protestingly, and sadly than defiantly. Not till nearly two centuries later is it clear that the perfervid genius has grown superlative, *praefervidissimum*, in praise of all things native. This could not well be avoided, especially after the chaos of the seventeenth century, and during the revival in the eighteenth. It is a curious speculation that in the great times the Muse was so shy, and that only in more comfortable modern days, and then partly by way of protest against *ennui* and the formal pipings of the Strephons, did Scotland discover that patriotic fervour which we know. Since which time the Royal Lion has ramped very bravely within his tressure, as the royal beast should ; and, let us add, long may he do so. Nevertheless, later Scots have done some wrong to his dignity and to their own, by trundling him round for the entertainment of the vulgar. In this literary caravaning, and by pistolling and pokering, it would not be strange if he lost something of his old spirit.

Scots may consent more willingly to the charge of domesticity. It is characteristic of northern poetry at all times. The older poets, when not busily narrative, or allegorical, or playing the courtier for an unpaid pension, are homely persons.

They seldom take us out of earshot of Rauf's rumbling cart, or Colkelbie's sow, or the 'flyting' tongues of country dames, or the fun of the farm, more or less savoury than in the 'midden-fight' ascribed to the elegant author of *Cypress Grove*. Clear as this is in the earlier literature, it is certainly a 'dominant humour' since Allan Ramsay's day. His nymphs are Maggy Johnstoun and Lucky Wood; and Parnassus lies very near Bruntsfield Links. His *Gentle Shepherd* and his shorter pastoral efforts like *Richy and Sandy* show how ill he carries his artifice: as in this opening dialogue:—

"RICHY.

What gars thee look sae dowf, dear Sandy, say?
Cheer up, dull fellow, take thy reed and play
'My apron deary,' or some wanton tune.
Be merry lad, and keep thy heart aboon.

SANDY.

Na, na, it winna do; leave me to mane.
This aught days twice o'er tell'd I'll whistle nane.

RICHY.

Wow, man, that's unco' sad!—Is't that ye'r jo
Hes ta'en the strunt? Or has some bogle-bo,
Glowerin' frae 'mang auld waws, gi'en ye a fleg?
Or has some dauted wedder broke his leg?

SANDY.

Naithing like that, sic troubles eith were borne:
What's bogles, wedders, or what Mausy's scorn?
Our loss is meikle mair, and past remeid:
Adie, that play'd and sang sae sweet, is dead."

As we read verses like these, and gather that here Richy is Dick Steele, that Sandy is Pope, and that Adie is not a threepenny piper, but, of all people, Addison, we turn for relief to the *Shepherd's Calendar* and think of Spenser's 'decorum' in his disguisings of contemporaries. It is not difficult to see that it is Ramsay's domestic style which denies him the secret of the pastoral. He set a bad example, at a critical time, but he had no strong following. We might wish that he had had more disciples, for a surfeit of this stuff might have helped Scotland to some change in poetic fare. Dialect was, of course, a determining factor.[1] It has probably done more than any other in preserving the cast of intimacy in Scottish verse down to our own day ; and, encouraged by the excuse that it is often more expressive and suggestive than standard English, it retains its place and upholds the honour of the ancient house of Whistle Binkie. There is no blasphemy against Burns's immortal Doric or against rustic life in praying that other motives may find favour with the Muse, that there may be escape at times from the buts and bens and far-bens of this overworked subject, that Scottish Horace shall not always 'stravague' in Ochil homespun. This is perhaps the fate of all dialect literatures, or of those parts of literatures which are written in dialect. The present-day

[1] See Chapter v.

attempts to create a national drama in Ireland are illustrative. In both the 'Abbey Theatre' and 'Ulster' plays everybody seems to be satisfied with a one- or two-roomed cottage, with 'pertinents,' as the lawyers say. 'Scene, a Kitchen' is standing type at their bill-printers: always the same setting for the comedy which amuses County Down or makes fun for County Antrim, for Gregorian farce as for *Riders to the Sea*. There may be, by way of 'local' compliment and as warrant of the playwrights' intimate knowledge, northern or southern differences of thatch and door, or of cottage ways and accent; still it is all and always a matter of kitchen and small farm gossip. The Irish writers have the beginners' excuse; and, intent on raising a home-industry, have no option but to take material that lies at hand. Scotland has a hoarier tradition of kail and potatoes and mutches and tappit hens, and, if she dream of a renaissance, may protest that these things poorly answer her longing and smack too much of outworn convention. But she has been slow in suspecting this habit of cottage musing over the unending 'matter' of Habbie Simpson, which has attracted the poets from Allan Ramsay to those with us. Even the dignified essayist on Truth, in his dignified surroundings, could not escape.

From this it is an easy step to the second characteristic, rudeness. We might say that they are

not unconnected, but by placing them apart we avoid the suspicion of holding that this uglier habit is of necessity, or exclusively, the affair of the homely Muse. Further, it may be well to say at once, to prevent misunderstanding, that we are not concerned with honest frankness, with the blunt psychology of sex, with the vigour of Pantagruel. The most fastidious must allow for these, if the 'criticism of life' formula is to stand the simplest test; and Goethe's warning against a schoolgirl criterion in literature is still good platitude. But the exclusion of these universal elements leaves a northern residuum. The problem is one of art, not of morals, which may be discussed without any confusion of view about change in social convention. It may be treated as a matter of general impression rather than by censure of single poets, for the Abbé's dictum still holds, that whereas one century may judge another, only his own century may judge the individual. There is no doubt that this roughness was intensified by the enlistment of the burgess and bucolic classes as a reading public; just as that coarsening of taste which gave Addison his spectatorial opportunity and confirmed Horace Walpole in his cynicism was the effect of the awakening of the pot-house intelligence of England. In both cases popular demand created a market for every kind of coarse cheap goods. But Scotland had

trafficked in these things before she made her literature a plain tale of country humours; as witness her most courtly and artificial poets, her scholars, and her theologians. Though it is easy to trace in this the direct influence of the realistic habit, we must admit that it is not unconnected with the fantastic strain in Scots. It is generally associated with the humorous and satirical, and, when it depends most upon the lower device of hyperbole, has something of the shock and suggestive contrariness with which the literature so often varies its serious mood. Though there are not a few passages where indulgence in nauseous detail is mere sow-nosing, yet the explanation, if not the defence, is often literary, analogous to that of the extravagance in "aureate terms," rhyme-jingle, and other exercising of the muscle of language, and sometimes of that of Swift's mood, when he revels in what he himself abhors, that the humiliation of his victim may be complete. Nearly always, however deliberate the passage may be, the critic seems to see an under-purpose of contrast. If, for the moment, we think of the skimble-skamble habit[1] of the Scot as a protest against, or, better perhaps, a relief from the prosaic orderliness of real life, we might call this a protest against or relief from the conventions of literary respectability. The analogy between the two reactions must not be

[1] See Chapter i.

pressed, for whereas the one comes only when the elves will, and knows no rule but theirs, the other, even when least deliberate, is never more than a simple problem in rhetoric. Sometimes indeed the amazing craftsmanship of the latter almost drives us to seek a more inspired origin, as if it were in such language that the King of Faery indulged when he fell on King Berdok or 'flyted' with his cowslip-neighbours—out of hearing, let us hope, of Bonnie Kilmeny and other gentle hostages. It would be easy to illustrate this characteristic, for there are few of the greater poets who do not offer examples, and the lesser are by no means ungenerous. The earnest student must not be squeamish in this matter. His perspective will be far out, if he does not take with his *King's Quair* and *Golden Targe* and *Gentle Shepherd* the Flytings, the John Cowpers, and the newer *Christis Kirk*. The worst are the best for a beginning. The very extravagance of the *genre* makes pieces like *The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo* less provoking than the companion southern gossip of John Davies or Sam Rowlands. Dunbar and Montgomerie pour such torrents that we can stand under their Niagaras and wonder at the din. All this rush and hubbub in the confined literary landscape may well amaze those who look only for the dowie dens of sentimental verse and the high castles of romance.

This rudeness is not far to seek in later Scottish writers whom English literature claims as her own. It has been well said of Smollett, in explanation of the contrast with his contemporaries in the fashioning forth of the novel, that he shows "such a bustle of coarse life, such swearing and rioting and squalor, and, above all, such incessant thumping and fighting and breaking each other's heads and kicking each other's shins as could never have taken place in any conceivable community, or under any system of police, unless the human skeleton had been of much harder construction than it is at present." [1] And though James Thomson's rhetoric and seriousness have given him an escape from the grosser things which his age enjoyed better than we do, he has more than once, and with the strangest incongruity, even in diction, let the roughness of the bothie invade his work.[2]

There is, in the third place, the effect of reminiscence. In no other country, with perhaps one exception, does the past grip the present as it does in Scotland. But the Italian peasant's homage to antiquity is a gentler service than the Scot's; there

[1] *Quarterly Review*, No. 205. One may accept this view without feeling that injustice is done to Smollett, and without risking the charge of ignorance of eighteenth century manners or of the fact that in the hands of a superior artist like Fielding conversation and narrative are so often interrupted by "a mighty noise" and scufflings.

[2] As in the picture in *Winter* of the "leap, the slap, the haul" of rustic frolic.

is just a hint of pride of ancestry, perhaps a touch of cynicism, in his shrug and laconic 'Gli antichi, Signor,' which answer all the stranger's questions and his own curiosity about the famous things he lives beside and cares to honour. He does not take *his* 'Pechts' and Cullodens quite so seriously and persistently. In saying this we do not meddle with the sentiment of patriotism or make any dangerous distinctions between popular enthusiasms. There is no warrant for holding that there is a necessary association of love of country with love of its past. Indeed, the contrary might be argued, and Frenchmen called to witness how in the words *La Patrie*, untranslatable and envied of all, the appeal to the past is incidental and counts for little. The Scot, on the other hand—at all events before the topsyturvydom of the twentieth century—never forgets the past. It is a matter of instinct with him. He fights for his ancestors as well as for his children. He must explain himself historically.

In Scottish literature this attitude to tradition is, however, something more than instinct or natural piety. Like Captain Grose, the Scot has "ta'en the antiquarian trade." It is another of those striking contrasts in character, that with the keenest appreciation of what is called, in blessed epithet, the 'practical' value of things there is found such zeal for the things that are merely old.

It is like finding a Yale lock on a thirteenth century ambry. There is no relic-hunter and relic-worshipper like your Scot. There must be few parishes of which the families, kirk, and traditions are not on record, specially and handsomely honoured outside the omnibus gossip of the *Origines* and *Statistical Accounts*, or few episodes, even beyond the magic circles of Queen Mary and the 'Forty-Five,' which have escaped this untiring scrutiny. Scotland is a land of monuments, and in none of these is national sentiment commemorated so bravely as in this literary cairn, to which so many hands have contributed. Is there a parallel to be found in any other small country, or, in like proportion, in any of the greater? The good folk of Edinburgh could finish their Valhalla on the Calton Hill with the shelf-loads of quarto and octavo gatherings from every nook of Scottish history and literature, which the printing-clubs and learned societies of the east, west, and north have added to the labours of single-handed venturers. We say 'history and literature,' for though the Scot has been partial to political and personal history and has an unsatisfied craving for the mysteries of the "tribe of Macfungus," he has not forgotten the poets. The early issues of the Edinburgh Bannatyne Club and the Glasgow Maitland Club bear testimony to an interest already aroused by collectors and commentators like Ramsay, Hailes,

and Pinkerton. From that time down to the Scottish Text Society there has been no lack of exploration. As the work proceeded, there arose the desire to join up these *disjecta membra* in a connected account, but the response since the feeble beginnings of Alexander Campbell and others inspired by Warton counts for little till we come to Mr. Hepburn Millar's *Literary History* in our own day. We may wonder why the interest in this story was so late in coming, when scholars and half-scholars had shown such zeal in the collecting and editing of all sorts of material, and when the Scottish commons had found pleasure in hearing the old gests and songs at festival and cottage hearth, long before Alexander Pennecuik tells us, in halting verse,

> "My lucky dade, an honest Whig,
> Was telling tales of Bothwell Brig;
> He could not miss to mind th' attempt,
> For he was sitting peeling hemp; . . .
> The meikle tasker, Davie Dallas,
> Was telling blads of William Wallace;
> My mother bad her second son say
> What he'd by heart of Davie Lindsay." [1]

But it was not likely that the historians would turn to a survey of poetry as long as they had chronicles and cartularies to 'expiscate,' and it is easy for us to misinterpret the peasant devotion.

[1] *Streams from Helicon*, 1720 ('Merry Tales for the Lang Nights of Winter').

The shepherds of the *Complaynt* loved the old tales of the *Red Etin* and *Tamlane* in the way simple folk should love them, or as the very formal author intended they should; and the songs brought them tunes for the dance. Quotations like that just given from Pennecuik's muddied *Streams from Helicon* are significant as showing that the poets were admired mainly as aids to patriotic reflection. We cannot think of the Dallases or Dougal MacCallums[1] being attracted to the *Bruce* or the *Wallace* or 'Davie Lindsay' for any other reason than the comfortable history of stalwart doings against Englishmen and priests. So, after all, it *is* history rather than literature, or the history that is in literature or goes with it, that gives popular credit to the Muse.

But there is more. What has been said leads on to the statement that the historical habit rules in Scottish literature, in all its higher and more imaginative work; that, quite apart from the influence of popular affection in establishing the reputation of Blind Harry and Lyndsay and others by some sort of historical sympathy, the literature, in its matter and certainly in its form, is deliberately and exceptionally conservative. It may smack of text-book commonplace to say that Burns is the final expression of what the national spirit had so

[1] Who "would hear naething but a blaud of Davie Lindsay," (*Redgauntlet*, Letter, xi.).

long dwelt upon and had made its peculiar purpose, and that his successors have been content to be little more than copyists; and it may be easy to find flaws in this, as in all generalizations. Yet it deserves attention; for though it is natural, if not also wholesome, to be sceptical of the genealogists who know Burns as a sort of Robert MacFergusson (or MacHerd) VicRamsay, it would appear that the wider and deeper we go, the more reason do we find for the application of what we may call the 'editorial' theory. This is not suggested in the narrower sense in which we speak of Ramsay's recasting of *Christis Kirk*, for the worse, or of Burns's rehandling of the songs, to their bettering, but with the meaning that from as far back as Henryson, and notwithstanding all checks from without, the indebtedness of each poet to his predecessors, individually and corporately, is unmistakable, and in none more so than in Burns himself. Through him the tradition passed on; and his successors, minors in power, harped on the old strings, the more complacently because he had played so well. He fixed securely in both professional and popular regard the subjects and manner, which, though time-honoured, might without him have lost some of their vitality and credit with those who could never be other than imitators. For this reason, not less than by his personality, he won the heart of a nation as poet has seldom, if

ever, done ; and the gist of so much of the January praise, stripped of extravagance, is the acknowledgement of his expressive power. This is not, in any reputable critical court, the full recognition which is his due for the gifts he offered. That recognition, which, as Stevenson has well said, is given for his style, not his matter, for his remarkable talent of "writing well,"[1] is to be found in the admiration of alien poets—of the great world beyond the Lowlands. To them the traditional elements make no appeal ; to his compatriots that appeal, however piously and rightly heard, has denied the appreciation of some things which they can ill miss. No one desires Scottish literature to grow indifferent to historical sentiment ; no Scot would offer the suggestion, and no Scot could accept it ; but it may be worthy of consideration by the North whether it has not indulged one pleasure to the loss of others. This ivy is a goodly plant, but let it not clasp the gray walls too securely. When the "battlements are overtopt with ivy-tods," the stranger knows that the sentinels are at rest. Then there may be risk that a national literature will be scheduled as an ancient monument, and be no more than a pleasure-spot for tourist readers in search of the picturesque.

The growth of this 'ivy' in the later period of Scottish literature was favoured by two conditions :

[1] *Men and Books*, 1889, p. 86.

first, in the eighteenth century, in the deliberate return to the past, afterwards, in the interpretation of the work and influence of Sir Walter Scott. The historical novel gave opportunities for fresh expression of an old mood and reacted on every department of literature. Though Scott did not impose, as some have thought, an antiquarian tyranny or make his own work a mere "business of buff-jerkins,"[1] he gave heart to the Oldbucks. There are serious risks when the care of literature is thus made over to our good friends the antiquaries. It is not suggested that matters of history are not subjects for the poet, as personal emotions or the moods of Nature are, or that in periods not necessarily the dullest the historian may not provide very useful commentary. But a little experience discovers for us that there are dangers when the historical habit, pious or curious, invades the liberties of art, to the 'strublance' of all good fairies; that, being more disciplined, it inclines to overassert itself most provokingly. Somehow the Scot is never shy of showing what hold the pageants of history have upon him. Even in his studies of the national literature, from the earliest efforts in the nineteenth century to the very latest, with perhaps only two exceptions, a goodly part of each might better find place in histories of the Tytler or Hill Burton pattern. And if this be true

[1] See Chapter ix, *infra*.

of these outer courts of literature, it is not less true of the inner, among the poets themselves, who so often—and so persistently since the seventeenth century—indulge their "mistempered humour" of retrospect. "Vain antiquarianism," Pater has said, "is a waste of the poet's power";[1] and in another place he reminds us how the museum mood of literature "induces the feeling that nothing could ever have been young."[2]

It is, unfortunately, only too clear that this antiquarian zeal has overstimulated the Scottish love of fact, and of the explanation of fact, and weakened that sensitiveness to the borderland effects of which we have spoken. Scott's treatment of the supernatural is a case in point. That other world of the strange and whimsical has no place in his art as it has in his predecessors'. What intrudes in its name, but rarely, and rather ceremoniously, is only 'mystification,' to be unriddled by its author or by its own absurdity, never justifying itself as proper entertainment for an age of Terror and Wonder—plain waxwork from the first, without any hint of Udolphine might-have-beens.[3] We should try to prove this not by that rather theatrical lady of Avenel, but by what is generally allowed to be Scott's master-

[1] *Appreciations*, p. 223. [2] *Ib.*, p. 138.

[3] The reader may be reminded of the long thrill in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* before the unveiling of the picture which "was no picture."

stroke, that "wildest and most rueful of dreams,"[1] Wandering Willie's Tale, in *Redgauntlet*. Yet its wildness and ruefulness hardly compensate us for Scott's disappointing surrender to the bourgeois sentiment which tolerates 'mystery' only as material to be explained by the literary detective. We begin to think better of the tale, and less of problems of brandy potations and a 'wanchancy' jackanapes, when we are told that Steenie "would have thought the whole was a dream, but he had the receipt in his hand, fairly written and signed by the auld Laird." But before long we are put out of humour by the flight of the unburnt paper up the chimney, in good stage fashion, "wi' a lang train of sparks at its tail, and a hissing noise like a squib."[2] Even Kilmeny's magic journey must be explained in the *Noctes*[3] by twaddle about "inspired dwawms" and by a theory of the "social affections." Fortunately, there is no confession of this in Hogg's poem, and the Ambrosian commentary is now quite forgotten.

There is another matter which is not inappropriate to these reflections on the emphasis, or, from another point of view, the limitations of Scottish

[1] Lockhart's *Life*, vii. 214.

[2] *Redgauntlet*, Letter xi. So too the Goblin in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* has been persistently condemned as theatrical, crude, and entirely unnecessary to the story, though defended by Minto, in his *Literature of the Georgian Era*, pp. 212 *et seq.*

[3] iii. pp. 121-122.

literature. The Scot's sensitiveness to natural effects has always been allowed, but his choice of theme, far from being general, has been confined to the sterner aspects; or, let us put it thus, the better to meet an obvious objection, his best and most intimate work has concerned itself with the frowns of the Dame, and his more conventional with her smiles.

Medieval literature declined acquaintance with these angry moods. There the attitude throughout is one of protest, either directly against the unfriendliness of winter and storm, or, by implication, in a perpetual chant of May. The familiar overture of "merrie fowles" and jewelled meadows in the poems and romances of the Middle Ages is not so conventional as would appear. It means that the Muse has found herself again; that months of draughty lattices, crowded firesides, ankle-mud, and other miseries of the 'good old days' are over for a time.[1] The poets sing of May to spite December. Later the expression of this summer-mood becomes more and more conventional, as the giving of thanks is apt to grow formal, though one's feeling of gratitude may remain lively. Indeed, it might be worth while investigating how much of what is merely

[1] How unmedieval is the Laureate who sings complaisantly of *Wintry Delights*—

"when broken roads barricade me
Mudbound."

artificial or traditional lingers unsuspected in modern naturalism.

The Scot, certainly when moved to write of these gentler themes, is as artificial and 'ennamelit' in his style as any. Witness Henryson, and Dunbar, and Lyndsay; even Douglas, when he makes effort to be original, as in the Twelfth Prologue, in honour of 'our hailsum May.' Such couplets as—

> "Soft gresy verdour eftir balmy schowris
> On curland stalkis smyling to thair flowris"

and

> "The roys knoppis, tetand furth thar heyd,
> Gan chyp, and kyth thar vermel lippis red"

are pleasant surprises on a canvas where

> "maist amyabill walxis the amerant medis."

Yet he, too, rarely forgets to be formal; and only when he attempts the winter passage from which we quoted in the first chapter does he show a freshness of touch which for that age is exceptional. The appearance of that passage is significant in the work of an 'aureate' school which had no decorative need of the cold, the dismal, and the cruel, except as a setting for satire or for homily on the deadly sins. The predilection is clearly shown in the popular verse outside the courtly circles of the Makars and of Drummond and his contemporaries, and especially in the Ballads, as, for example, in *Sir Patrick Spens* and *Tamlane*. In

the first the fear of "deidly storm" and the grim circumstance,

> "When wind and weet and snaw and sleit
> Came blawing them behind,"

discover the tragic motive and supply an effective setting.[1] In the second, when Janet has "kilted her green kirtle" and is off to Carterhaugh, and the well is found and the roses pulled, the singer is not tempted to 'paint the scene'; but when she goes to Miles Cross, we are told that

> "Gloomy, gloomy was the night
> And eerie was the way."

To know that these lines are a later addition, and by Burns, only strengthens the argument, for they disclose at what point and how the modern poet found his opportunity. This is confirmed in the subsequent editing by the 'gentleman residing near Langholm,' who, when he interpolated some verses for the benefit of the readers of *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, touched up the same part of the picture thus—

> "The heavens were black, the night was dark,
> And dreary was the place"

and

> "Betwixt the hours of twelve and one,
> A north wind tore the bent."

[1] The difference between the version here quoted from and the shorter one, first printed by Percy, lies chiefly in the working-up of the storm picture.

If it be asked why we should expect any setting but this in pieces such as these, since pathos and tragedy do not invite the pictorial calm of summer-tide, the answer is best made, *more Caledonio*, by a further question, why should this drab of life and nature prove so attractive to the Scot? And why was it, we are tempted to ask, that the expatriated Scot, whose *Seasons* guided the changing taste in English poetry, chose Winter for his first subject?

> "See, Winter comes to rule the varied year,
> Sullen and sad, with all his rising train—
> Vapours, and clouds, and storms. Be these my theme;
> These, that exalt the soul to solemn thought
> And heavenly musing. Welcome, kindred glooms!
> Congenial horrors, hail!"

If Dryasdust find here some reminiscence of boyish admiration of Robert Riccaltoun, who had wooed the Muse in her angrier mood,[1] we proceed to ask why the farmer of Earlshaugh so made *his* choice? Further, it might be recommended to the curious to consider why Thomson in his early verses *Of a Country Life*, the foreshadowing of the *Seasons*, gives to Winter four times as much space as to Summer or Spring, and eight times as much as to Autumn—a proportion completely changed in his extended southern version.

[1] *Winter*: printed in Savage's *Miscellany*, 1726, and revised by Mallet in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1740.

At the coming of the Revival, with its 'native'[1] images and 'domestic'[1] landscapes, it was still in the greys and colder sepias that the poets worked to best purpose. Burns's praise of 'Honest Allan,' that he painted 'Auld Nature to the nines,' was a pretty compliment by one who could be generous, and it was not intended for serious analysis. It would require small critical cunning to see that in Ramsay the idyllic is not his happiest vein, that the 'burnie' never 'trots' as briskly between his 'birks' as it does by the 'hazelly shaws' of the younger poet. The oft-quoted passage on the pool at Habbie's Howe, to which Burns also refers, hardly owes its repute to the perfection of 'natural' sentiment. Even in Burns himself, as in that delight of the anthologies, the description of the streamlet in *Hallowe'en*, the appeal is chiefly as a *tour de force* in wordcraft. Less frequently than we might imagine is his eye on Nature for her own sake. Although he holds that no poet ever found his Muse

> "Till by himsel he learn'd to wander
> Adown some trottin burn's meander,"[2]

he lets us see that she is at most but an aid to reflection on other realities. Yet when he does claim in the same poem, and rather ceremoniously, that all Nature's 'shows' appeal to him, he

[1] See the Preface to the *Ever Green*, and *infra*, p. 89.
[2] *Epistle to William Simpson.*

cannot disguise his deeper sympathy with her mood, when

> "Winter howls, in gusty storms,
> The lang, dark night."

When her countenance, like that of Fergus in *Waverley*, "resembles a smiling summer's day," we are always "made sensible . . . that it may thunder and lighten before the close of the evening."[1]

The long dark night and the storm have, however, done more for Scottish poetry than answer to its pathos or its gloom. They have bidden her to Poosie-Nansie's and merriment,

> "When hailstanes drive wi' bitter skyte,
> And infant frosts begin to bite,
> In hoary cranreuch drest,"

as in an earlier age the shivering Muse sought cheer in tavern-song. If pathos and frolic be the sum or nearly all the sum of Scotland's literary endeavour, small wonder then that her art has so rarely shown the summer mood of Nature, and that when she has done so, she has hung her 'pearls' rather formally on the 'dewy fields' of Ballochmyle.[2] Like her poet, the bravest and yet the gentlest of all her singers, she had her hansel from a "blast o' Janwar' win'."

[1] *Waverley*, ch. xviii. [2] *The Lass of Ballochmyle*.

CHAPTER III

THE FOREIGN ELEMENTS

Such then—if we may borrow a metaphor from old-time leechcraft—is the 'complexion' or 'temperament' of Scottish literature, with the Intimate and Whimsical as its 'dominant humours'; such too, as in the best ordered bodies, the 'distemperature' which comes by excess or loss in these 'proper qualities.' There remains, unless we seem to overwork our metaphor, the astrological part of our diagnosis, to seek what influences flowed in upon the literature and determined or controlled its 'life.' This is a more straightforward task, for history, philology, and other aids supply us with an astrolabe which leaves little in doubt.

Scottish literature has been affected by foreign influences both in the working habits of the craftsman and in its artistic direction. The problem of the first is more immediately racial and political, though the moulding of the national character could not be without effect on general taste. That of the second is, on the other hand, mainly

'literary,' involving questions of style and of 'school'; strong enough at times to transform a single poet and to make disciples, to arrest or disguise national characteristics, but never to destroy them. Consideration of the first involves the study of matters of social and political concern and of ethnology, of which the literary historian may disclaim all right to speak. Even were our scientific friends to agree as to the strains which have produced what is airily called the Scottish type, they would find a world of difficulty in connecting the national character with their conclusions on blood and skull and colour. Who or what is the 'real Mackay' in this pedigree can never be an easy problem, nor a whit simpler than the search for that real Hibernian who is the least common multiple of Kerry and North Down. Nor does all that we think we know of Tacitus's Teuton, or Renan's Celt, or Skene's Pict help us much.

In starting this survey it is necessary to clear our minds of some prepossession. The terms 'Scot,' 'Scottish,' 'Scotland,' taken in their full modern significance, may lead the reader astray, unless he is careful to make certain adjustments. The name 'Scots' was first applied, and applied exclusively, to the language of the area outside what we may name, loosely, the Lothians and Borders. It described the speech of the settlers in Alban, the Celts of the Goidelic branch; and, after

their kings had brought the eastern territory of the Picts under their rule, the vernacular of the region north of the Forth.[1] So it remained, alike to the Anglian colonists south of the Forth and to the Bretts or 'Welsh' of Strathclyde; and it continued to be applied even beyond the time when the dominion of these 'Scots' had been extended southward, and had become, by the thirteenth century, identical, at least in nominal jurisdiction, with the later kingdom. From the 'Scottish' or 'Gaelic' point of view this extension was, both politically and linguistically, an anglicizing; for the rulers who gave their racial name to the larger 'Scotland' acquired the manners and speech of the stronger Anglian civilization, and by influence and policy intruded the Teutonic element along the eastern fringe of the older 'Scotland,' and there probably the more easily because that region was the last to come under the Celtic power. The Scottish Kings and their Anglian subjects of the Lothians and Fife spoke 'Inglis' (English) and called the speech of their northern people and western neighbours 'Scots.' This alienation between the anglicized Scot and the Gaelic Scot, made concrete for us in the story of Duncan and Macbeth, was strengthened by the Wars of Independence. Examination of that conflict should

[1] This section goes over some of the ground of the writer's *Specimens of Middle Scots*, Introd., pp. xiii. *et seq.*

bring before us two important facts, which have not always been noted. The first is, that the struggle was primarily the resistance of the last remnant of the Anglian settlement to the encroaching Norman authority; the second, that this 'national' and 'Scottish' defence (to use each of the epithets in its modern sense), or, to state the issue in its more historical, if almost paradoxical, form, the resistance of the English of Scotland to the Anglo-French of England, was hampered by the active enmity of the northern and western 'Scots.' When modern Scotland emerged from these troubles, not untouched by that Anglo-French civilization which she had defied in the open, the division between her southern and northern peoples had become absolute. For more than a century later 'Scots' means in Lothian writers and in the dispatches of ambassadors at the Scottish Court the Gaelic speech of the Highlands and Islands: to them it is the speech of 'savages' and 'bribour bardis,' and generally the badge of social disrepute. It is the highest honour to be a Scot of Scotland, but the tongue must speak 'Inglis.' When the author of the *Wallace* describes Thomas de Longueville, he is careful to draw a distinction—

> "Lykly he was, manlik of contenance,
> Lik to the Scottis be mekill gouernance,
> Saiff off his tong, for Inglis had he nane;"[1]

[1] Bk. ix. 295-297.

and in his frequent use of 'Southroun' for 'Inglisman' he shows how loath he is to identify the term 'Inglis' with the enemy of England. As the recognition of this confusion, or the risk of confusion, in applying the term became more general and the usage proved more and more distasteful to northern patriotism, some change was necessary, if only for political reasons. Besides, though the speech was still 'English,' it was now standard and 'national,' with differences unknown in earlier periods. So by the sixteenth century the once-discredited 'Scots' became by the *force majeure* of politics the proud title of the northern tongue, and Gaelic, Macgregor-like, had to surrender its name. By the will of the Sassenach it passed, with the Galloway and Carrick speech, as 'Ersch' or 'Yrische.'

If, at the shaping of an independent Scotland, the speech of its people, south and east of the Highland Line, was 'English,' so too was the literature. Philology tells us that the verses on the cross at Ruthwell could be proved to have been carved at Edinburgh or at York, had the stone been found at either of these places, and that there are few differences, even slight, between the language of Barbour written at Aberdeen and that of the hermit of Hampole in the south of Yorkshire. This linguistic unity within and beyond the confines of old Northumbria has

its parallel in the literature; in which there is no evidence of variation, unless perhaps in the stronger Norman flavour of the work of the more northern area. There are no remains to show, as in England, the distinctions between the curial Muse and her vulgar sister which might be helpful in explaining later differences. It is doubtful whether they ever existed; and, if they did, whether they could tell us anything of the literary development. They might be an aid to the study of the language, especially on the Gaelic borderlands, and to the unriddling of forms which perplex the student of Middle Scots. All this is, however, irrelevant to the statement that the literature of Scotland was in its beginnings English in sentiment, as it was in its language. Later, after the Wars of Independence, a series of assaults, of varying vigour, were made upon this isolated 'Scottish' literature, in close parallel with the foreign pressure brought to bear upon the language, and, in certain notable respects, upon the general polity.

It might be expected that the separation from the South would throw the nation into closer contact with the alien elements within its own jurisdiction, and that, in especial, there would be some reaction by the Gaelic upon the general habit. History, however, supplies an emphatic negative, and shows that, for some time after, the

alienation remained so complete that neither of the elements paid the other even the compliment of combat. That the inroads came from the South is, after all, not surprising in the circumstances, for good quarrellers are good borrowers, and literature roves and reaves at will, knowing no Debatable Land and no Statutes for Border Peace. Kinship enforced acquaintance; and it was not unfitting that the South should try to wrest some compensation from the poets for what it had lost to soldiers and statesmen. With a fine courtesy, and with no suspicion of disloyalty, the poets received the stranger, and bade him come again. Indeed, the guest never lost touch with his amiable hosts; but there were three occasions, each of special interest for their elaborate show of welcome.

On the first of these occasions, early in the fifteenth century, Scottish literature yielded wholeheartedly to the genius of Chaucer. There is perhaps no parallel to the suddenness of the change in the national manner, and to the completeness of that change; or anything so remarkable as the immediate and continuing vigour of the transformed verse. It is traditional with us to speak of this Anglicized century as the Golden Age of Scottish Poetry, and to measure its power with that of the discipleship of Chaucer in his own country, to the shaming of the latter. Why a fashion so artificial and alien won its way so soon, and lasted

well into the sixteenth century, why it became the inspiration of all the poets whom we still call great, and not only united the most diverse minds in a common purpose but imposed upon them a new craft of verse, and upon poetry even a new language, are problems which will not be solved in haste. For with literatures, as with peoples, the delight in novelty of this exotic kind is generally shortlived, and as generally confined to individuals or small coteries. But in Scotland this affair of the Court became an affair of the public in a more complete way than happened in England; and so held for a time, though older methods lingered in the alliterative verse, the chronicle-poem, the legendary, and other medieval stock-in-trade, for there must always be stray corners and old-fashioned folk left after the wildest revolution.

Yet, if this was a revolution, it was so in a restricted sense; and 'wild' it certainly was not, however hard may appear the task of adjusting the mood of the *Palice of Honour* to that of works like *The Holy Fair*. The careful student, if he is to satisfy himself that there is any truth in the plea of continuity, must take a narrower measure of these spectacular differences. He will see that the movement was inevitable, that it was the belated coming of a wave sweeping round the whole European shore, that its course would be by England, and that it could not come by any other

way. By a pretty fancy we enshrine the story of the change in the 'Romance of a King's Life,' or, in pictorial allegory, draw the spirit of Dan Chaucer appearing to the first James in his English prison and bidding him go preach a new gospel to the North. That the young king learned in his exile to love the 'maister dere,' that he carried his poems to Scotland as truly as he took Joan Beaufort, that his own *Quair* (whether we have *his* text, matters not), so full of reminiscence of the author of the *Legend of Good Women*, made, and made quickly, a courtly fashion of that poet, need not be disputed, nor the wide effect of the royal enterprise underrated. Nor need the effect of this personal influence appear smaller, were it true, as some would assert, that the awakening of this new interest came much later in the century. Chaucer or no Chaucer, James or no James, the coming was in Scotland's destiny. The isolated northern Muse, finding new opportunities at a Court so amiable to letters, had a mind to other strains than suited venerable Archdeacons devoted to history and saintly legend. National self-consciousness demanded a more expressive medium. It was a question of manner, of form, not of new ideals; the craving for what contemporary England received from Chaucer and thanked him for, and for nought else; the desire for relief from the old plain style, for the making of verse more royally.

There were no guides ; and when Scotland chanced on Chaucer, it was as one chances on what one seeks. Superficially studied, the transformation appears as a set-back to the development of a national ideal. We seem to understand why the perfervid modern turns from it as barren of the qualities which characterize later work. Yet even with all its exaggeration it played a part in the discipline of the Muse, which did not serve her ill when she made later protest against the alien and artificial. If it be one paradox that this intensified Anglicism gave Scotland her 'Golden Age,' it is another that when the popular revival took head in the eighteenth century it was to this transformed fifteenth century that the poets turned with affection. Stranger still, when this courtly fashion had spent itself, Scotland at once welcomed another, and yet another, as gifts from the 'auld enemy.' As politics strained the bonds more and more, art's necessity forbade the breaking.

The second English influence was of a different sort. Literature, grown tired of the 'termis celicall' of verse, turned to political and theological controversy. Though this was not the whole business of letters, it certainly was an absorbing interest, and the atmosphere in which it thrived proved unwholesome to poetry. England had recovered herself, but Scotland had completely lost the lead which the Makars had given. It is there-

fore not surprising that so far as poetry was concerned the recovered vigour of the South should act on the North even more strongly than it had done in the fifteenth century. The literary annals show how little self-reliance had been left and that all that was best in an age of very minor poets was foreign-bred and mainly English. The flickerings of the Sempills and the protest of Bysset in favour of the quaintest of travesties of the "maternall" manner and of Alexander Hume (the grammarian) against the "conceat of fineness" are poor evidence of native vitality. Patriotic dulness like Simion Grahame's or Lithgow's, the whole art of peregrination, what there is of drama, the lucubrations of Patrick Hannay—all this mixed stuff sends us at once to Overbury or Rich or Brathwaite or any other of the minors of the South. Not language alone betrays that other Alexander Hume, of the *Day Estivall*, or the covenanting laird of Rowallan. And what more deliberate wooing of the southern Muse than by that coterie of writers, called, rather pedantically, the 'Anglo-Scottish Poets of James's English Court,' among whom we name Lord Ancram ("The Muses' Sanctuary"), Murray of Gorthy, Alexander of the *Monarchicke Tragedies*, Aytoun, Drummond, and the soldier Montrose? Never a thought of Pipers of Kilbarchan comes to these courtly singers; not even of their courtier predecessors the Makars. Ben Jonson might take

his ease for weeks at Hawthornden and hear of none of these, whatever the native Muse might whisper in his ear as he tramped to 'Lomond Lake' or made merry at Master John Stuart's lodging in Leith. Subject, treatment, tricks of style, are pure Elizabethan—echoes of Spenser, even of his archaism, of Drayton, Daniel, and the rest; everything, *pace* Ben's judgement of poetry as writ at Hawthornden, very much "after the fancy of the time" as they understood the business of writing in the England of James and Charles; all very English, or sometimes Italianate in the English way, as these—

"Slide soft, fair Forth, and make a crystal plain,
Cut your white locks, and on your foamy face
Let not a wrinkle be, when you embrace
The boat that Earth's perfections doth contain." [1]

"Those golden palaces, those gorgeous halls,
With furniture superfluously fair,
Those stately courts, those sky-encountring walls,
Do vanish all like vapours in the air." [2]

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
That dares not put it to the touch,
To gain or lose it all." [3]

It would be no shame to any reader who, not knowing where these lines are to be found, began his

[1] Drummond, *Poems, First Part*, Sonnet xxxix.
[2] Alexander, *Tragedy of Darius*, Act iv. Sc. iii.
[3] Marquis of Montrose, 'My dear and only love, I pray.'

quest in some Jacobean *Miscellany* or in Mr. Saintsbury's repository of the Caroline Muse.

When we turn from the verse to the plainer tale of the historians and homilists—of Spottiswoode, or Calderwood, or Knox, or Baillie, or of Rutherford and Leighton—we find like evidence, and more persistent than the occasion of this prose might lead us to expect. Knox's Anglicism is the most remarkable of all, not merely in the language, which must have appeared strange to his countrymen, but in the style. Nor is this to be wondered at, for the galleys on the Loire, life at Geneva, preachings at Newcastle, and sojourns in London, whatever they contributed in different ways to the unsettling of native habit, were nothing in their effect to the polemical literature with which England flooded the North. Contemporary record takes note of the fact in the charge made by exiles, such as Ninian Winzet and John Hamilton, that the national style was dishonoured by their Reforming adversaries. Though there is a touch of the ludicrous in the latter's calling these opponents "triple traitoris, quha not onlie knappis suddrone in your negatiue confession, bot also hes causit it be imprentit at London in contempt of our natiue language,"[1] and though much of these foreign-printed protests are as perverse Scots as Knox's is, the recognition of differences and of the ill-treatment of the native

[1] *Catholik Traictise*, 1581.

style is of some historical significance. To this may be added the strange fact that the vernacular Bible, which played such an important part in these controversial times, and later, was always English. The discovery some years ago of a Scots version of the New Testament does not modify this statement, for Nisbet's text (c. 1520), as it may be called, was not printed till the beginning of this century,[1] and there is no reason to believe that the manuscript was known outside the little circle of the Ayrshire Lollards. Till the issue of the Bassandyne edition by authority of the General Assembly, in 1576-79, Scotland had imported every copy of her Bible from England; and the Bassandyne itself was nothing but a straightforward reproduction of the Genevan version. When Lyndsay in his *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* makes Good Counsel quote the Vulgate "Fidelis sermo, si quis Episcopatum desiderat," etc., he adds, in unblushing 'suddroun,' "That is: This is a true saying, if any man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a worthie worke," etc.[2] It is therefore not hard to see what effect this English Book, and the English books about it, had on the whole trend of Scottish literature, even outside the strictly

[1] By the Scottish Text Society, ed. T. G. Law, 3 vols., 1900-1904.

[2] ll. 2912* *et seq.* Such passages as in the *Complaynt* (E.E.T.S. p. 24), from *Deut.* xxviii., in Lyndsay's *Satyre* (l. 2602), from 2 *Thess.* iii. 10, and in the preliminary pages of the *Gude and Godlie Ballatis* (S.T.S. pp. 5-7) have a more individual interest.

religious and Puritanical verse. What was left of Scottish self-reliance was rudely shaken when the Englishman Francis Rous ousted not only Zachary Boyd but the 'Anglo-Scottish' Mure of Rowallan as Psalm-maker-in-ordinary for the Kingdom.

The third phase of English influence appears in the eighteenth century. This phase follows almost automatically on the second. There is no difference in character or direction, as between the first and the second. It expresses itself in more literary terms, as an effect of the wide social and political preparation in the preceding period of English influence. Scottish writers had a larger opportunity, and in the circumstances were more likely to be attracted than coerced by southern culture. Scores of biographies tell of the magnetism of the English capital, how the Thomsons and Homes and Mallochs turned to London—most of them to stay, a few to return and come again. When Englishmen like Gay wandered northwards, they made holiday as curious persons bent on knowing more of the new province in which Jacob Tonson's writ now ran; and, however varied were their reports of what they saw, none had reason to doubt the goodwill of their northern hosts. The problems of language and accent pressed hard, and throughout the century the more ambitious Scots were painfully exercised in undoing the national differences in these respects. These searchings of

heart, the untiring efforts in prose and verse to compete with the Englishman in his own medium, the writing of formal pamphlets on northern imperfection by men of such standing as David Hume and his opponent James Beattie, not to speak of lesser fry like Elphinston, Sinclair, and Mitchell, show how fast events were moving. What they chose to call 'Scotticism' was a fault. The word, which is no older than Defoe, was to the Englishmen who first used it merely a label for the characteristics of the new-settled London-Scot, but it soon became more familiar in Scottish mouths as a confession and self-criticism. It had come to this, that it was no longer a question how much Anglicism could or should be incorporated, as reasonable or advantageous or unavoidable, but how much of the native element remained as a barrier to the desired perfection in writing and speaking.

On the literary side the process is not less clear. Scotland gave her days and nights to Addison and all the Queen Anne writers—the more readily because a literature so troubled about its formal shortcomings was best served by another which professed to offer models in Wit, Good Taste, and the exercise of the Rules. Verse and prose, in each and all of their kinds, had guidance for the asking. Yet there were difficulties in the way of thorough discipleship. Scottish literature could

not assume the lightness of the *Spectator* or *The Rape of the Lock*. These were altogether too foreign to northern habit, even the most frolicsome. A general restraint or oppression lay too heavily on the art of the eighteenth century to admit of successful defiance—witness the draggings and brakings in Hume and especially in Robertson ; and the northern literature, by approaching, of set purpose, so closely to its neighbour, had grown only more sensitive to the differences which remained, and more nervous that it could not surmount them. Galled that at the very time when it would be at one with its object of admiration it should be most keenly alive to the difficulties which stood in the way, it sought to make good in rhetoric. Posterity has dealt severely with this choice, which played havoc with prose, Hume's excepted, and turned so much of the verse to mere sound and vanity, nowhere more flagrantly than in Thomson, in his home apprenticeship and, later, in his work in England. So it fell out, by way of Nemesis for these many prayers for relief from its shibboleths, that Scottish literature was stricken with a new impediment.

For a time, however, but not for long, Scottish literature was hardly conscious of its plight. After confidence and self-gratulation came disillusion. The forces of reaction, encouraged by this failure, were given their head towards the

revival of everything that was felt to be originally and essentially Scottish. Though the conditions which caused revolt were in the main identical with those in England, the terms of protest differed. If Scotland, like England—to some extent independently of England, and to some extent through her example—appealed from neo-classical conventions to a freer Past, to Nature, and to Sensibility, she appealed also to Nationality. In the south, the readjustment was, if the phrase be not misunderstood, more an academic matter: poetry had grown dull in the schools, and new methods had to be devised. The critical outpourings of the great leaders of the movement—the militant *Prose Prefaces* and *Essays on Poetry*—make confession of this. In Scotland this critical incitement was hidden, if it did exist. She felt that, however much she had lost to artifice in the general process which had undone others, she had lost more by her ready surrender to alien sentiment. To recover primary feelings she must in the first place recover her own individuality. So, whereas the Englishman said amiably, 'Let us go to the Middle Ages, for we are tired of our own, and to Olney and Rydal Mount, for Gough Square is stifling,' the Scot said he would turn to olden times and countryside and village fun, and *burgh* taverns and noise too, because they were *his*, not only because their appeal was direct and exhilarating. When it was

given to Allan Ramsay to speak the first word of defiance to "affected delicacies and studied refinements," [1] he appealed to the "natural strength of thought and simplicity of style our forefathers practised." He contended that "when these good old bards wrote, we had not yet made use of imported trimming upon our cloaths, nor of foreign embroidery in our writings. Their poetry is the product of their own country, not pilfered and spoiled in the transportation from abroad: their images are native, and their landskips domestick, copied from those fields and meadows we every day behold. The morning rises . . . as she does in the Scottish horizon. . . . There is nothing can be heard more silly than one's expressing his ignorance of his native language. . . . Shew them the most elegant thoughts in a Scots dress, they as disdainfully as stupidly condemn it as barbarous." Though he points directly at the literatures of Greece and Rome and at modern Italian and French affectations, he does not leave us in doubt that his protest is against obsequiousness to patterns less remote.

We may wonder that this restlessness was so late in coming, but we wonder more at some of Ramsay's methods of carrying out his reform. Neither he nor any other in his age could make a clear retrospect. He certainly did not see—we

[1] Preface to *The Ever Green*.

may say, in extenuation, could not see—that in turning his back on one Anglicism he welcomed another. We rub our eyes when we scan the contents of his *Ever Green* and measure his debt to the Makars and to later poets who wrote under English influence. When we read *The Thistle and the Rose*, *The Golden Targe*, Stewart's *Luvers Mane*—

> "Quhen Flora had owrfrett the firth,
> In May of ilka moneth Quene," etc.,

and other aureate delights, mixed with versions of *Christis Kirk*, and Flytings, and modern fakes like *Hardyknute*, we begin to understand what he really means by "imported trimmings" and "foreign embroideries." In their ardour of protest against the degenerate taste of their day, the antiquarian reformers took no thought of the character and origin of the material which they offered as a corrective;[1] but they prepared the way for work more truly Scottish, by restoring the national self-confidence, and they had their reward in the sympathy of a wider public, both cultured and bucolic, and in the triumph of Burns. Thereafter Scottish literature pursued a double course. English influence remained vigorous, and grew,

[1] It is but fair to Ramsay to remember that he admitted that the 'greatest value' of 'two or three' of the pieces in his collection lay in their 'antiquity.' This allowance does not affect his thesis, or ours.

and grows, to the confounding of the experts who must find a northern or southern label for every modern writer and book. The vernacular Muse piped on lustily for a time, till with the scattering of the village crowd and through the fussing of the Perfervids, her notes began to falter. Her self-confidence had been won on terms too narrow. Her neighbour, with larger purpose, sensitive, and willing in discipline, snatched away her reward, to the greater honour of their common country.

The second foreign influence was Latin. This was more than a scholar's matter, even in the sixteenth century, when in every country of Europe the vernacular had won its way. In Scotland, later than in many places, Latin held its own, as a living language as well as the medium of literature. There is no lack of evidence to show that, even in quarters where we should least expect to find it, the Scot thought in it, and that he often found difficulty in expressing himself in his 'maternall tong.' In vocabulary especially the effect was great, and an instance or two may serve to show the attitude of Scots writers and the difficulties which stood in their way. When John of Ireland describes the purpose of his book, he apologizes for his style by saying that, being "nurist" in France in the Latin tongue, he "knew nocht the gret eloquens of Chauceir, na colouris that men

vsis in this Inglis metir."[1] Douglas, when giving us our first verse translation of the *Aeneid*, is concerned with the weakness of Scots in making a "ganand translation" of Virgil, and often solves the difficulty by carrying over the words and idiom and presenting them in a native disguise, so thin that no Scot ignorant of Latin could have profited anything. Even Bellenden in his translation of Livy makes a point of 'exceeding' his author. The writer of the *Complaynt of Scotlande*, who is all for simplicity, plunges into this strange defence: "ther is mony wordis of antiquite that i hef rehersit in this tracteit, the quhilkis culd nocht be translatit in oure scottis langage . . . ther for gyf sic wordis suld be disusit or detekkit, than the phrasis of the antiquite wald be confundit and adnullit; ther for it is necessair at sum tyme til myxt oure langage witht part of termis dreuyn fra lateen, be rason that oure scottis tong is nocht sa copeus as is the lateen tong."[2] And, strangest thing of all, this author who gives us a mosaic of translation from the French is more Latinized in his original passages than in those which he conveys.

The influence of this borrowing could not but be great on the literary side. It helps to explain how easily Middle Scots poetry took to the task of

[1] *Specimens of Middle Scots*, p. 97.

[2] Ed. E.E.T.S. pp. 16-17. 'V,' as in 'vordis' has been replaced by 'w,' which the French printer's case did not contain.

naturalizing the methods of the Rhétoriqueurs and their followers, and why there is less suspicion of fake and pedantry in their 'aureate terms' than in the work of Lydgate and Occleve in the south. Even Lyndsay, who was sheering off from this affectation, and cannot be charged with finesse in scholarship, gilds his style with an ease which few southern poets can rival. So when the author of the *Complaynt of Scotlande* takes farewell of his reader, thus:—

> "Now for conclusione of this prolog, i exhort the, gude redar, to correct me familiarly, ande be charite, ande til interpreit my intentione fauorablye, for doutles the motione of the compilatione of this tracteit procedis mair of the compassione that i hef of the public necessite nor it dois of presumptione or vane gloir. Thy cheretabil correctione maye be ane prouocatione to gar me studye mair attentiuelye in the nyxt werkis that i intend to set furtht, the quhilk i beleif in gode sal be verray necessair tyl al them that desiris to lyue verteouslye indurand the schort tyme of this oure fragil peregrinatione, and sa fayr weil."—

we think of Lexiphanes's burlesque of Dr. Johnson, or the mock of *Chrononhotonthologos*, and seem to have lighted on a humourist who would have drawn an apology from Sydney Smith, if he had heard the plea that this writer had "vsit domestic scottis langage, maist intelligibil for the vulgare pepil," and had not thought it necessary to have his

tractate "fardit ande lardit" with "exquisite termis, quhilkis ar nocht daly vsit." But the more fun we see in all this, the more clearly do we confess our modern prejudice. Nor is there any allowance possible, as might be made in the case of a translator of Virgil, or of a writer on law, or theology, or political philosophy, that the author was constrained to pedantries, and was conscious of them.

Just at the time when the vernacular verse had achieved some success at the hands of the Makars, and prose had begun to try its fortune beyond the paternal home which had reared Fordun, and Boece, and Major, the promise of fuller activity was rudely stayed: just at the beginning of that long sterile stretch from the middle of the sixteenth century to the close of the seventeenth, when guiding genius was most needed. The weakness of Scots was the opportunity of Latin, and many a poet of respectable talent, scornful or shy of the vulgar noise of the one, devoted himself to the service of the other, in every kind and grade of verse-making, from the *Jephthes* of Buchanan, praised of Ascham, to the *poemata* and *poematia* of the tribe of Pitcairne at the opening of the eighteenth century. Scholarly vanity, not timidity, turned Buchanan aside, to the loss of Scottish letters. Yet we seem to know enough of him to see beneath the transformation some qualities which might have brought great strength to the verna-

cular ; and a like regret catches at the reputation of Florence Volusene, and of others enshrined in the dainty volumes which Arthur Johnston produced at Amsterdam in 1637 at the expense of Scot of Scotstarvet. *Delitiae Poetarum Scotorum hujus aevi illustrium* runs the title of this *corpus* of thirty-seven poets, including the famous John Barclay of the *Argenis*, the 'admirable' Crichton himself, Thomas Dempster, there more excusably imaginative than in his *History*, Arthur Johnston of the *Psalms*, Andrew Melville, Alexander Ross, Andrew Ramsay, in whose work the egregious William Lauder discovered the quarry of *Paradise Lost*, authors of *Lusus Poetici*, *Parerga*, *Epigrammata*, *Musae Aulicae*, *Sylvae*, *Lachrymae*, and what not. Serious and dignified Latin all of it: with much before it and later—in 'Muses' Welcomes,' versions of the Psalms, and occasional verse ; in *Ludi Apollinares* of a hundred years ago, "containing," as the undertakers thought, "some choice morsels, particularly translations into *modern Latin* of some truly laughable poems in the *ancient Scotish language*, a language now hardly understood even in the metropolis of Caledonia," a strange second burial of *Christis Kirk*, *The Monk and the Miller's Wife*, and the *Wyf of Auchtermuchty* ; and, for frolic and contrast, in some rather muddy macaronic, connecting the *Burschen* Muse of the Middle Ages, in

unbroken descent through Dunbar and Drummond, with our grandfathers' days.

Scottish literature never lost touch with Latin, whether for exercise or in more inspired moments, right down to our complacent age of 'Greekless areas' and 'Modern Humanities.' The full meaning of this association may some day be thought worthy of research. It was both gain and loss. When we think of the latter, let us not forget how well this use of Latin served Scots, if only by keeping before it at all times, and in the darkest hours, a literary ideal and the discipline of art.

Popular opinion has so exaggerated the influence of French, especially on the language, and has had such generous backing in certain philological quarters, that Scots would appear to be a sort of French dialect. There were few Scotsmen in the 'eighties of last century who were not convinced this was so, when M. Francisque-Michel had marshalled the evidences in a bulky quarto of over four hundred and fifty pages.[1] His modest plea was that "to thoroughly understand Scottish civilization, we must seek for most of its more important germs in French sources."[2] The opinion was perhaps not unreasonable then, if we think of

[1] *A Critical Inquiry into the Scottish Language*, Edin., 1882.
[2] *ib.*, p. viii.

the science at his command, but its general acceptance must have appeared strange to the Englishman who sees in the Scot an incorrigible sentimentalist in home matters. And yet, after all, it *was* sentiment—historical sentiment—as much as anything else that reconciled, and still reconciles, the Scot to the Frenchman's conclusions. It is so easy to find Scotland a borrower, in the tale of the Alliance, in the resort of generations of Scottish youth to the lecture-rooms at Paris and Bordeaux, in the modelling of the College of Justice on the *Parlement* and of the Universities on those of France, in the opportunities which came to merchants and soldiers-of-fortune, in the influence of Calvinistic theology in the framing of a Reformed Church, in the sojourn of Jacobite Catholic exiles, in the frequent holidaying in the French capital long before the days of Hume or Sir Walter. And all so clear, because Scottish *gigots* are served on Scottish *ashets*!

In leaving this question of the exaggeration of French influence on the language to the philologers, it may not be impertinent to remind the reader of two things. The first is, that the French element in the literary speech was incorporated in three ways—from the Anglo-French naturalized in the earlier period, from the Anglo-French and French received in the middle period through the Chaucerian poems, and from the later "French of Paris" which passed over during the League. Of

these the first, the baronial French of the Lowlands and of the *Romances*, is the most important, and the last certainly the least. Philology has no doubts on any of these matters; and History is ready to offer a cooling card to the good people who delight in fanciful views of international and social conditions created by the pacts of kings and politicians. The second point is, that of the claims of the different Romance elements in Scots that of Latin is not only great, but the strongest. We have already hinted why this pre-eminence should be expected; and it is not our present purpose to offer the proofs. No great philological experience is required to help one to the best of sport in the Francisque-Michel preserves.

French literary influence was never strong, and is hardly found outside the poets whose work is of an artificial and experimental kind. Very little Gallicism came in through the translations, even in books like the *Complaynt of Scotlande*. The *Romances*, as might be expected, confess their origin, but their influence declined quickly, and what remained is only a matter of language. Henryson's non-Chaucerian *Robene and Makyne* may link itself with the *pastourelles*, but this means little, even if it could be proved to be less original than we take it to be. If Charles d'Orléans persuaded his fellow-prisoner to leave his Chaucer for a time, literary history tells us nothing; and the

Quair yields no hint of French tradition. Dunbar may have met Villon, but he learned little, even if we choose to find something of the form and *timbre* of the *Grand Testament* in the verse frolic of the Scottish friar. It is not till we come to the courtly poets of the reign of the sixth James that Scottish verse, indulging the eclectic taste of Shakespeare's contemporaries, took thought of borrowing from France. Till recently the opinion was generally held that the greater part of the foreign matter embedded in the verse of Drummond and his circle had come into Scots through English channels, and chiefly through Spenser and Sidney, or, at most, that some Italians, especially later writers, such as Guarini and Marino, had been studied at first hand. There was, of course, Du Bartas, who, with or without his Sylvester, was everybody's familiar. But, now, we have learned that the Pléiade exerted a strong and direct influence on the poets of that age, and claims as much as the English and Italian models. Drummond transfers gaily not only from Ronsard and Du Bellay, but from Desportes, in the *Diane*, and from minors such as Pontus de Tyard, in the *Erreurs Amoureuses*, and Jean Passerat; and Sir William Alexander is part Ronsard and part Du Bellay.[1] Still, with all their borrowing from the

[1] See the S.T.S. edition of Drummond, 1913, and *Mod. Lang. Review*, III. i., IV. iii., V. i.

Pléiade these poets added little or no Gallic flavour to Scottish literature. The vocabulary was eked out, as will always happen in copying and translation (we think of Douglas's immediate debt to Virgilian Latin), yet even there it is easy for us to be misled.[1] Thereafter hardly a suspicion of French influence is to be found. The "affected class of fops" chidden by Ramsay for drawing from French and Italian at the expense of Scots did not vex literature overmuch, and they soon passed away. Visits to Paris did as little for the native Muse as did good French claret at home; and when we sum up the later account we look in vain for any literary imports to set against the debt of the foreigner to the *Waverley Novels*.

Lastly, there is the question of the influence of the Gael upon his Lowland neighbour. We might be tempted to think that two partners in one polity would, even if they were not on the best of terms, affect each other in some way, and that literary art would follow its own will, as we have seen it did in another case.[2] Belief in the effect of good neighbourhood has encouraged the pleasant theory that the sense of colour and the love of external nature which are characteristic of the literature were the gift of the Gael to the 'dull' Anglian. We have

[1] *Cf. Mod. Lang. Review*, v. i., where 'decore' and 'ramage' are cited as examples. [2] *Supra*, pp. 76-77.

already hinted[1] at the difficulties in the way of accepting this view, and we are still without the evidence which it is the first duty of the holders of this view to supply. To us it seems clear that the Highlander or Islesman, whatever he did for his own aesthetic culture through sennachies now forgotten, had no mission to the South, and no opportunity for it. There was harder business on hand; and each side took the other in terms of that business. The Lowlander on his part showed by his unfriendly attitude to everything Gaelic that he was in no mood to be a debtor. Indeed the unbroken expression of racial antipathy from the very beginnings of Scots literature down through every one of the poets of the Golden Age and past the closing years of the seventeenth century, when William Cleland's gibes were welcome, is one of the most remarkable facts in northern literary history. Not till the dark days of the 'Fifteen and 'Forty-five were over, and, in the general reaction against classical complacency, England and Scotland had welcomed the novelty and mystery of the Ossianic legends, were happier relations established. These the spectacular art of Scott confirmed, and the Sassenach yielded himself, as he had never done before, to the glamour of the farther North and West.

[1] *Supra*, Chapter i.

CHAPTER IV

DRAMA AND PROSE

It would not be unreasonable to expect that the intrusion of these foreign elements would give a wider range to the literature, or to hold that association with a neighbour, so rich in every kind, could not fail to influence general taste. On the other hand, it would not be too foolish to assume that the studied following of foreign models, throughout a period of marked restlessness, political and social, involved, if not the staying, at least the degeneracy of national growth. Such problems in the life-history of a literature, as in the career of an individual, are not to be solved by ingenious speculation on the probable or possible. Our only recourse is to the facts. So let us turn for a moment to the old classification of Poetry into its three main kinds, Lyric, Epic, and Drama, even though we recognize that this pigeon-holing is not free from pedantry and may be an indifferent aid. For "literary compositions," as Lord Kames has said, "run into each other precisely like colours:

in their strong tints they are easily distinguished; but are susceptible to so much variety and of so many different forms that we can never say where one species ends and another begins." What then is the Scottish range of "strong tints"?

Of Lyric, old and new, there is surely no doubt; of love-song, even had Burns been silent; of passion for the simple delights of Nature; of bacchanal and religious fervour; and, in later days, of patriotic enthusiasm. The battle-song, the more formal ode, and the elegy are offered too, though more rarely than might be expected. Certainly, there is in all the kinds of lyrical expression sufficient evidence to discredit the narrowest view of northern 'dourness' and reticence. In Epic the case is hardly so clear, at least in the more comprehensive type. There is no Scottish *Odyssey*, or *Aeneid*, or *Divine Comedy*, or *Jerusalem*, or *Lusiad*, or *Paradise Lost*. The *Brus* is not of the stuff of which these are made; its historical habit does not help it, for that is too actual and the facts are too near. Henry the Minstrel's effort is of less account. And what is there to show of Scottish endeavour in high epic till we come to the *Course of Time*, which our great-grandfathers were polite enough to say they "heard, entranced"?

> "As some vast river of unfailing source,
> Rapid, exhaustless, deep, his numbers flowed." [1]

[1] Book IV.

Time, in his wisdom, has rounded on his chronicler, and Scotland, fortunately, has had no second Pollok. Of the less sustained varieties there is not much outside the Ballad, for the verse-tales are nearly all in the burlesque vein, stories of Friars of Berwick and Priests of Peebles and Ayrshire souters; and there is little in the pastoral form besides Ramsay's formalities at Habbie's Howe, and little of the idyllic note to be heard before or after the *Cotter's Saturday Night*. The Ballad, with its mingled 'tints' of epic and romance, is honest compensation for the lack of many things. Yet the whole sum is strangely modest, and we are tempted to find a contributing cause of the epical penury in that unrestrained 'intimacy' which has done much for Scottish literature in other ways. We do not require Lord Kames's reminder that "familiarity" is the curse of epic, "the peculiar character of which is dignity and elevation." As the Scot must have his cottage-interiors and tavern 'clash,' he must do without his Archangels and Godfreys, and not take it amiss if the Miltonic Satan declines acquaintance with his kinsman of Alloway. In this undoing of the hope of epic, the national love of burlesque and topsyturvydom has been a ready ally. We cannot give the fairies the stature of heroes; and the laughter of Puck is the confusion of dignity. The Scot has laughed with him often; but when he would be serious he

has fallen to satire, to plaint, to apologue, to homily, to plain narrative. He has had apparently no liking for the 'grand style,' and has passed his time comfortably without it.

It is remarkable that Scottish literature not only shows this restricted range, but confines itself rather stubbornly to certain paths within it. We might expect that in the zigzag of circumstance in which it developed there would be less persistency or uniformity. The transition from one dominant form to another, as appears in the passing fashions of English literature, say, from the drama of the sixteenth century to the novel of the eighteenth, has no counterpart in Scotland, except in a very subsidiary way. That insoluble problem of other literatures, why one age so loved the playhouse and another the drawing-room, is never pressing. The absence of marked change may be in great part due to the 'historical' habit, which at all times, but especially in the later period of revival, asserted itself in the directing of northern taste.

There is the third literary kind, Drama ; but of this there is as little (or as much) to be said as Niels Horrobow was able to say of the owls and snakes of Iceland. Scientific duty compelled that worthy to set apart a chapter[1] to tell us "There are no owls in the whole island," and another[2]

[1] xlii., 'Concerning Owls.' [2] lxxii., 'Concerning Snakes.'

to intimate with like brevity that "No snakes of any kind are to be met with throughout the whole island." But Horrobow, being an honest man and, as we have hinted, scientifically inclined, remarks in a foot-note to the first that a Mr. Andersen, burgomaster of Hamburg, "says there are various species of owls in Iceland, as the cat-owl, the horn-owl, and the stone-owl," and that there is "a print of one catched in the farther part of Iceland on a ship homeward bound from Greenland;" and in a foot-note to the second chapter he reports that this Mr. Andersen is of opinion that "it is owing to the excessive cold that no snakes are found." An excellent pattern for an account of the Scottish drama! For is it not true that 'there is no drama in the whole literature,' even if we play the Andersen by referring to some 'cat' or 'horn' varieties, only to prove the rarity of the whole genus? And we can have our one strange bird 'catched' in the 'farther part' of the country, in a certain William Livingston,[1] the only Gael in all Scottish record who is known to have produced what friendly Celtic scholars are content to describe as a "dramatic poem, so-called."

The record is, at its fullest and with most generous allowance, indeed one of the quaintest chapters in historical nonplus. The antiquaries

[1] See Magnus Maclean, *Lit. of the Highlands*, 1904, p. 182; Donald Maclean, *Lit. of the Scottish Gael*, 1912, p. 72. Livingston is late (1808-1870).

have searched in vain for material, and, lacking the Dane's frankness, have fallen to padding out their little chapters on the national drama with careful analyses of Lyndsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*. David Irving (1861) begins with Maximus Tyrius and Gregory Nazianzen; James Maidment confines his energies regretfully, in his *Fragmenta Scoto-Dramatica* (1835), to forty years after the 'Fifteen (1715-1758); and Ralston Inglis in his *Dramatic Writers of Scotland*, a meagre duodecimo of 1868, shows the flimsiest result of "some years" labour in snippets of biography of minor poets and moderns of a dramatic turn. Mr. Henderson (1898) and Mr. Hepburn Millar (1903) present the whole matter as a frilling of a few paragraphs to their descriptions of Lyndsay's Morality. Were our purpose merely to record, we could not add a single fact to what these books have told and retold. All the owls to be had have been 'catched,' and reasonably well stuffed too; and all that remains to the makers of text-books is to see that they are occasionally dusted. It is not a long task to run through the fragment of the *Dwarf's Part of the Play*, ascribed to Dunbar, and the *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* of the middle period; *Philotus*, for comedy of a kind, and the English *Monarchicke Tragedies*, dull for chamber-study, and not for the stage; and the exotic *Douglases* and *Sophonisbas* of the eighteenth cen-

tury. There is nothing else but stray references in Knox and Calderwood to lost Moralities by Kyllour and others unknown, or, in unliterary corners, to entertainments of a dramatic character, miracles and pageants; nothing else for us to read but the academic Latin plays of Buchanan.

It may well be asked, in that easy way we put hard questions to ourselves, why Scotland failed to produce a dramatist worthy of the name. We seem to see in the prevailing 'intimacy' of Scottish literature the promise of dramatic development, and especially of comedy, which came early in English and other vernaculars and had for nurse a realism no whit more helpful. Yet, a little investigation will show that it is not a problem of might-have-been or should-have-been; that we are to ask ourselves, not why drama did not develop, but why it could not develop.

There is the ever-ready argument of Puritanical opposition. "It is owing to the excessive cold that no snakes are found there." Historians have told us when and why the temperature fell so low, and we are asked to believe that literature, even more reputable than drama, could not escape the 'perillous cauld,' and to look at the benumbed and empty years of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We see the coming again of the old winter which the early leaders of the Church, from Tertullian to Salvian, had invoked on a play-loving world, and

in which the English Precisians would fain have involved their generation ; but with this difference, that in Scotland alone it gripped with a strange relentless rigour. Nor do we fail to see the master-touch of irony in this chilling of northern art, and of northern drama in particular, by the very forces which the dramatic genius of Lyndsay, more than any other agency, had roused to activity. Yet however true this snowing and freezing may be of the past, or, for that matter, of the present, on some of the slopes of the Scottish Parnassus, we must not assume that Puritanical inclemency was the sole cause of disaster. No zealotry could suppress lyric freedom, and the Muse, whether true-love, or light-o'-love, or frankly ribald, inspired the Scot when she willed, and by feebler pens than Burns's, even when the laws of the Righteous were most severe. In Scotland, as elsewhere, drama would have defied all interference, had it outgrown its infant weakness. Though an epidemic Puritanism carried it off, it was from the first, and was destined to remain, even if fate had been kinder, a 'puir shilpet cratur.' The problem is one of family history, rather than of rough handling by the Assembly of the Kirk.

That it is a problem of individual vitality is made clear by comparison with English dramatic literature. The South had no lack of Gossons and Prynnes and Colliers to rail at playwrights and

other 'caterpillars of the Commonwealth,' of pulpit exhortation, and of 'discipline' by scandalized authority. Had the opposition there been twice as strong, it could not have killed the craving for dramatic expression. We cannot imagine any system of control depriving the Wife of Bath of her pleasure in Miracles, or making the play-loving folk of York lose their interest in seeing Noah mocked by his wife and Judas at the mercy of the Porter, or throttling the drama of the Great Age half as successfully as the infant Shakespeare chokes the serpents in the well-known picture. The Cromwellian dispensation could not banish the drama for good; and though, on its return, it showed loss in literary vigour, and perhaps in popular esteem, it failed as one fails in old age and yields to younger talents. If the Puritan would not be of the audience, he had now and then to take his part on the stage. We get the measure of the difference between southern and northern conditions when we ask what would have happened had some courageous Scottish Jonson dealt thus freely with the Saints—as an unforgotten poet dared to do later with the Holy Willies and the Aulds.

It is clear that when the tyranny was least strong, or when, during that tyranny, rebellion was most active, Scottish drama did not find its opportunity. If Lyndsay's Morality appears to be an exception, and the only one, let us remember how much of its

credit came from its display of qualities which were in no sense dramatic—its allegorical purpose, and, above all, its satire; and that it failed of successors because as drama it discovered no motive which could be an incentive to later talent or offered no model which could be followed even mechanically, and because as satire it drew upon its kind the opposition which overwhelmed the controversial Morality elsewhere, whether Catholic or Reformed. We are led irresistibly to the conclusion that though Puritan sentiment thwarted dramatic development, its task was not difficult, and that if its repressing influence had been stayed, or even if it had never been vigorous in the North, development would have remained uncertain. If, therefore, the effect of this superimposed Puritanism may be disregarded, what arguments can be brought forward that the conditions for the growth of a national drama were unfavourable? There is, in the first place, the general consideration which is connected with what has been already said of the familiar and retrospective habits of Scottish literature. These are even less of an aid to the dramatist than to the epic poet, if they are not accompanied by what is after all the dominant characteristics of drama, the sense of movement and the presentation of that movement in a coherent and, it may be, single action. The realistic and historical details can never be more than the

setting; they supply the literary scenery and properties. Epic has the power of self-recovery from the crowded fact, partly in its slower action, partly in its greater freedom of arrangement and even of creation, partly because its dealing with things old or far removed, though real enough, relieves it from the oppression of the immediate and familiar. If, therefore, the Scot has done so little in the epic because he has not allowed himself this relief, it is not surprising that he has done so little in drama, in which an unrestrained interest in the familiar must always be a barrier to its purpose. Tragedy, if we apply to it any test approaching the Aristotelian, may be at once ruled out; and comedy is choked by its own aids, as Jonson's would have been in his best plays, had not his zest for realism been guided by his dramatic instinct. When later Scottish drama, of the eighteenth century, endeavoured to avoid this risk, it encountered, as we shall see, another not less dangerous.

So it would appear that in what should have been the formative period the inventorial and antiquarian habits destroyed the hope of drama. If that hope ever came, it came late, and then too it was thwarted, by the pressure of other forces. One thinks of the author of the forgotten *Doom of Devorgoil* and *Auchindrane*. If Scott possessed one great quality more than another it was that sensitiveness to movement, which helps him so

well to overcome the natural inertia of his descriptive style. It might have brought him some success as a dramatist, though he protested that his "turn was not dramatic."[1] He was well aware of what was essential to the genre, how "the plot, or business of the piece, should advance with every line," how many plays "superior in point of poetical merit fail merely because the author is not sufficiently possessed of the trick of the scene, or enough aware of the importance of a maxim pronounced by no less a performer than Punch himself, 'Push on, keep moving.'"[2] He tells us that it is a great defect in drama to be "ill-combined,"[3] and that though the unities of time and place always appeared to him to be 'fopperies,' the unity of action was the one indispensable rule.[4] Yet he made his attempt in this kind rather half-heartedly, and posterity will not revise his self-criticism. The spirit of the age was against him, and what might have been given to drama in other circumstance went to verse-tale and the creation of the historical novel. There he had opportunity of displaying his mastery in uniting what may be called the dynamic force of great narrative with the static force of description. If there he has given us movement, he has not less truly provided what has been described as "a gallery of landscape

[1] Lockhart, *Life*, x. 195. [2] *ib.*, vi. 278-279. *Cf.* ix. 78.
[3] *ib.*, vi. 282. [4] *ib.*, 308-309.

and 'interior' such as had never been known before"—which, we may add, is not the business of the dramatist, or helpful to him.

A second consideration is that the literature had small opportunity of indulging a dramatic taste by reason of its distraction to other interests. There was Humanism, which drew off Buchanan and deprived Scots of advantages which could not have failed to flow from a talent so truly native, even to faults. In his four tragedies, the *Jephthes* and *Baptistes* and the versions of the *Medea* and *Alcestis*, northern quality has but small opportunity of making itself felt. Yet, with full allowance for their weakness as drama, for the dulling effect of academic exercises, written for pupils and to scholarly ends, and for their satirical bent, these plays encourage us to think that, had other circumstances been given, Scotland might have had, if not a Jonson, at Ben's best, as reputable a playwright as the 'Tribe' produced. Scotland never wrested her own from Humanism, and though for many years after Buchanan her college youth played in Latin, she was content that they should confine themselves to the rendering of classical masterpieces, without even a 'Westminster' prologue to relieve the strict discipleship.

There is this further fact, even more strange, that at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when Scotland was most receptive of English

culture, she was untouched by the dramatic energies of the South. There is no reflection of the taste of Shakespeare's age in the North or in the work of the London-haunting Scots; nothing but the tedious dialogue of Alexandrian tragedy or the poor borrowed fun of that "delectabill treatise" *Philotus*. Jonson's visit to Hawthornden stirred no ambitions; there they talked of Sidney and the Latin poets, of *Poly-Olbion* and the *Ars Poetica*, of masques and Inigo Jones, of Shakespeare's 'want of art,' and of the quarrels of rival dramatists. Drummond held on his course of sonneting and making of madrigals and epigrams, devoted to his 'French and Italians,' venturing *once* on some speeches by Caledonia, Endymion, Saturn, Jove, and other solemn personages for a spectacular *Entertainment of King Charles* at his coming to his northern kingdom.

The truth is that drama requires a longer period of preparation than other forms before it can use outside models to advantage. It is still a text-book conundrum why Elizabethan literature was so strongly dramatic. We used to be told, in diluted or travestied Symonds, that the secret is to be found in the active spirit abroad in politics, religion, and society. There was a good deal about merchant-adventurers, and about the new worlds of Columbus and his friends; and the siege of Constantinople played a contributory part in the

literary exposition. Whereas, in the main, and with due respect to debts of plot to the Italians and others, the problem has always been of home concern. The explanation at each stage is the history of the previous stage ; everything tells of experience, and of wide experience. The adoption of the Senecan elements would have been futile without this preparation ; Marlowe, Kyd, and Lyly built their fabrics on it, each in his own way ; Shakespeare his or theirs. When in England fashion suddenly became exotic, it as quickly forgot its whim, and literature showed no lasting effect from the indulgence. The Heroic Play is witness of this, even in face of the fact that its appeal to the ceremonious utterance of sultans and princesses was a protest against the plain-tale of everyday life, which was already voiced freely in the non-dramatic literature. Scotland lacked all this experience and experiment. The Hawthornden coterie could not have made, had they so willed, the reputation of a Scottish Globe or Blackfriars. When, in the eighteenth century, under the pressure of a new ambition, the North studiously imitated the southern theatre, we see only too clearly how feeble that following was, and why it failed of even moderate success with contemporaries. What it lacked by way of tradition it tried to furnish forth from the armoury of rhetoric ; it showed no 'action,' and it had no self-confidence. Artificial, grandiose, stilted, in

the worst sense applied to eighteenth-century apprentice work—all these it was. It clutched at history, thinking there to find the strength and the local appeal which might save its name. But *Douglas* could not save it, and all the *Alfreds* and *Britannias* and *Sophonisbas* of the London Scot brought no honour or aid to the drama at home. Thereafter only two courses lay open to Scottish drama ; either to continue this making of pompous lifeless tragedies, or to turn to the humours of the kitchen. It tried both, and, latterly, showed a stronger liking for the ways of simple folk, both 'burghal' and 'landward'—a good beginning perhaps, but as it should have begun three hundred years before ; and hopeful perhaps, if something more than a protest against the *ennui* of the middle-class day, or a restless craving for contrasts.

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that during the later period, that is from the eighteenth century, there was yet another barrier to the progress of drama in Scotland. This is more directly a question of the literary medium and is associated with another which will be considered later in this chapter in connexion with vernacular prose. Pinkerton hints at it in the Preface to his *Scotish Poems* (1792), where, in his remarks on the drama, he says :[1] "It is singular that our theatre should so little resemble the English, or any other. Sir

[1] Vol. i, p. xxi.

Thomas Saintserf's and Mrs. Cockburn's plays, of the last century, form a mean introduction to the fame of Thomson and Home.[1] In comedy we are still deficient; and it is a general opinion that we are strangers to the English humour and wit: but these qualities depend so much on 'thinking in a language,' and a perfect use of all its delicate lights and shades, that it may be reasonably inferred that, when the nations are blended into the same speech and pronunciation, we may aspire to comic fame, especially as in our own dialect, written and spoken, much humour at times appears." We have already said that Scots, despite its zeal in imitation, was unable to carry over the lightness of the *Spectator* or the crispness of the *Rape of the Lock*, and that, as it came closer, or appeared to come closer, to these models, it became more sensitive to the differences and to the difficulty of overcoming them. In comedy, certainly, the literature was "deficient," though not, as Pinkerton put it, because it was impervious to English humour. The act of 'thinking,' if not exactly in a 'foreign' language, at least in a half-familiar medium, denied the mobility in expression, the flow and point, the repartee, which native English art had acquired after long labour. The Scot had not mastered the art of these, with all his assiduous copying, and he found the task increasingly dis-

[1] *We* can now adjust this perspective.

heartening. So, in the end, he sought relief in the fustian and rhetoric of the Norvals and Ormisindas. There is no Scottish quality in these things; and of English little else than what the genius of Garrick, or Mrs. Siddons, or Mrs. Barry may have imparted.

Even more surprising than this lack of Drama is the failure to achieve a vernacular Prose. Not only was a national prose late in appearing, but it never throve well; and it succumbed for reasons which may be worth the seeking.

We need not go farther back than the fifteenth century, for the snatches of legal and official prose found in the late fourteenth are of no literary concern. It would not have been strange if even the fifteenth century had produced nothing. With our knowledge of the poverty of effort in England among Chaucer's contemporaries, we should not expect any development within the northern literature of that time. Nor might we look for evidence later, when the literary energies of Scotland were absorbed in carrying on, in successful rivalry, the work of the English Chaucerians. But, later still, when the North, in its turn, lost its poetic cunning, we might hope for signs of an awakening interest in prose, as we find them appearing in the South, after the verse had fallen so

low. Research, however, tells us that no prose-talent passed northward or disclosed itself there. Prose hardly appears before the middle of the sixteenth century, and then apologetically or half-heartedly, as if it were forced upon literature by the stress of politics and controversy; unconscious of any artistic purpose as hinted at by the first southern writers from Pecocke to Fisher, and without a single touch of the craftsmanship of Malory, or even of Caxton. There is nothing in Scots then, or indeed later, like that passage of the throwing of Excalibur into the lake, or a hundred others, as good or less good, in the *Morte d'Arthur*; no confession like that of our first printer's delight in French prose, because it was "so well and compendiously set and written," and of his ambition to make his English as fair. When the Scot pleads for the 'maternal tongue,' it is as Lyndsay does in his 'Exclamation to the Reader' (and that is in verse), for every reason but a literary one; or as John of Ireland, or the author of the *Complaynt of Scotlande*, or Bellenden does, with shyness or with priggish condescension. He recognizes it as a necessary instrument for theological and political propaganda; rarely, if ever, does he try to get out of it the formal values which he seeks in line and stanza and poetic diction.

This difference of attitude is clear. Scottish

prose, like English, begins with translation, the best and only means of self-improvement open to a young vernacular. It is very serious in the business of transferring the "sentence" (as the slang of the Chaucerians has it) from Latin and French to plain Scots, but it takes no thought of the form, of anything corresponding to what the weakest disciple in verse understood by the discipline of "rhyme." Something of the old shame clings to vernacular prose as the vehicle for the unconsidered scraps and pedantries which could not be put comfortably into verse. Such pieces as the *Craft of Deyng*, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, and *The Vertewis of the Mess*, for homily, and Sir Gilbert Haye's translations, for the instruction of soldiers and gentlemen, are perhaps no whit more serious or dull than Reginald Pecocke on Faith or overmuch blaming of clergy, or Sir John Fortescue on the governance of England. But the mood never changes in the North. There follow in halting Scots the theological disquisitions of John of Ireland, Cadiou's translation from the French, called the *Portuus of Nobilnes*, worthy of remembrance only as one of the first tasks of the first Scottish printing-press, Myll's *Spectakle of Luf*, and a snippet of mere annals entitled *The Schort Memoriale of the Scottis Corniklis*. Then, in the sixteenth century, we have Nisbet's translation of the *New Testament*, Gau's *Richt Vay to the King-*

dome of Hevine, from the Danish, Bellenden's version of Livy and his Scottish History, the quaint *olio* called the *Complaynt of Scotlande*, Ninian Winzet's Tractates and his translation of Vincentius Lerinensis, the political discourses of Bishop Leslie and the Scots version of his *History*, Buchanan's satire on Lethington, Knox's *History*, the Catholic arguments of Nicol Burne and other exiles, Memoirs and Diaries, King James the VI.'s *Schort Treatise*, of small literary pretence—all concerned in teaching, stating, refuting, or cursing, with hardly a thought, except perhaps in the *Complaynt* and, later, in the *Rolment of Courtis* of that most affected scribe Abacuck Bysset, of the mere pleasure of writing, if not well, at least with care. There is no Scottish Caxton who, "having no great charge of occupation, . . took a French book and read therein many strange and marvellous histories, wherein [he] had great pleasure and delight, as well for the novelty of the same as for the fair language of French":[1] no hint of a northern writer struggling like Pecocke with the vernacular difficulties of divinity and moral philosophy, and seeking an aid to interpretation in the sheer exercise of word and phrase.[2]

If there are any exceptions throughout this

[1] *The Recuyell*, Preface.

[2] See the passage beginning "Even as grammar and divinity be two diverse faculties and cunnings," in the *Repressour*, Pt. I.

period—and we might extend it down to the eighteenth century or later—they are to be found in papers of a more private character, in the diaries or in odd corners of historical accounts, in reported conversations of picturesque episodes, that is, only in those places where the professional sense of the writer is least active. We are thinking of, for example, Knox's tale of the first defeat of the Congregation, when he describes the Queen sitting on the rampart welcoming her "victorious sudd-darts" with their loot of kirtles and household gear; or the well-known passage in the *Diary* of Mr. James Melville about Knox's preaching at St. Andrews. There are many passages like these imbedded in the work of those whom we may call the controversial historians, and of the best in Kirkton's *Secret and True History*, but most strikingly, because least expected, in the Acts and Decreets of the Privy Council. It will be hard to find in any other country the solemn record of the law so relieved by human interest and easy frankness. Each 'minute' may start fair in style-book fashion, with its 'anent,' its 'albeit,' and the rest, but before long we come upon other matter, in no place better than in the story of Gordon of Gight's disorderly doings in 1618.

> "And the said Mr. William haveing opponit aganis his furie his awne innocence and impossibilitie to gif him contentment in that

> mater quhairwith he burdynit him, and then the respect quhilk he aucht to carey to his Maiestie and his lawis, and the havie wraith and judgement of God that wold still persew him gif he medlit with the said Mr. Williame his innocent blood, yit nothing could content him, bot with horrible aitheis he avowed that nane sould releve him out of his handis, and that he sould ding a sword throughe thame that durst presome to releve him, uttering in this meantyme mony disdanefull speetcheis aganis his Maiestie and his lawis, saying that he knew the Wynd of the Tolbuith and how to gyde his turne, and that he hes had to do with the gritest of Scotland, and had outit his turnis aganis thame. . . . And so, they being sinderit, he past in to the place, and with grite intreaty wes moved to take some refreschement, and then to ly down and tak rest; bot he wes so fer distemperit and careyed with a cruell purpois of revenge as he could tak no rest, bot rease immediatlie, saying to his wyff, 'Jeane, I can tak no rest. I knaw I will die upoun a scaffald. Thair is ane evill turne in my hand, quhilk I avow to God presentlie to performe.'" [1]

In this very human document, the more interesting to us because it deals with a maternal ancestor of the poet Byron, nothing is missed, and there is no artifice. The good secretaries of the Privy Council were, doubtless, as innocent as other secretaries of literary finesse. Yet here a crisp natural style outwits the discipline of the clerk's table and the

[1] The rest of the graphic story of the laird's disorderliness ("he sould go mad, lyke Richie the foole, gif he wer not revengeit upoun thame") will be found in the *Register of the Privy Council*, vol. xi. pp. 397-399.

pomposity of the historian. The Scot's liking of realism, of details for themselves and in their accumulated effect, breaks in even in his most ceremonious moments. It is pleasing; it is on the way to good art; but it is only in the narrowest sense literary. When Scots prose becomes conscious, this disappears, and turgid rhetoric and foreign-made syntax take its place.

The failure of Scottish prose to develop in the earlier period, on lines parallel to what we find in other vernaculars, may be ascribed to the distracting power of Latin. This acted in a double way, by curtailing the range of subjects and by imposing a strong classical habit of idiom and syntax. It is not extravagant to say that the Scot often wrote his prose, thinking in Latin as he proceeded.[1] Of this there is ample proof, both from confession by the writers and from the internal evidence of style. Later, the enthusiasm for English models played havoc with what was left of native pretence; so that in an author like Knox the Scottish characteristics are but occasional shows of northern idiom and vocabulary, touching up the text like trimmings on honest south-country cloth. The decoration is agreeable to our modern taste for contrasts, strong effects, and fresh suggestion, and we forget the fabric on which it rests. But the most liberal scattering of Scots words and phrases, however

[1] See Chapter iii., *supra* p. 91.

expressive these may be where ordinary English fails, could never give, even in the loosest sense of the term, a *Scottish* prose.[1]

As time goes on, the vernacular becomes more and more the concern of verse, till it is completely so in the Revival in the eighteenth century. That would not have made the creation of a national prose impossible, had not the tradition grown up that the vernacular should be the medium for the humorous and burlesque. To be comic one must write in verse—the better in vernacular verse. It is hard to recall offhand a single example of humorous prose in the middle or early modern periods. The dedication of vernacular effort almost exclusively to subjects of an occasional, humorous, or burlesque kind implied the denial of experience in the more serious mood of prose, perhaps even the power of indulging that mood. When an attempt was made, and on rare occasions, to escape from the mere pedestrianism of annals, and memoir, and homily, Scots felt its unfitness, and turned at once and whole-heartedly, as the author of *Cypresse Grove* did, to the guidance of the stranger ; and when in the eighteenth century the literary range was so extended that prose needed no longer to be the vehicle only of history or polemic, it refused the opportunity, and even

[1] On the use of Scots words and forms in English see later in this chapter and in the next.

resigned such rights as it had enjoyed. Then logically enough, but in strange contrast with the earlier mood, it studiously removed all that remained of the old trimmings—brushed the 'Scotticisms' off, as if they were mud-spots on its southern broad-cloth. In this mood it has remained. For what appears in later writers like Scott and Galt to be a recovery of lost Scotticism is not really a literary recovery. It is very occasional in these novelists and others, and is rather a matter of accent than of vocabulary. It is employed for a special spectacular purpose, to strike a note or differentiate a character, in the stage fashion of Shakespeare's French doctor or Welsh man. It is, in the theatrical sense, a mere 'property,' and most in use in what may be called the 'costume' kind of narrative. There is no better instance of this than 'Wandering Willie's Tale' in *Redgauntlet*, to which reference has been already made for another purpose. An extract will suffice. "He had no sooner uttered the word than all was dark around him ; and he sank on the earth with such a sudden shock, that he lost both breath and sense. How *lang* Steenie lay there, he could not tell ; but when he came to *himsell*, he was lying in the *auld kirkyard* of Redgauntlet *parochine*. . . . There was a deep morning fog on grass and grave*stane* around him, and his horse was feeding quietly beside the minister's *twa* cows." It is not hard to

see the purpose of this gentle sprinkling of Scottish accent over the straightforward English, and to note the distributive effect of the few Scots-spelt words on their neighbours and on the whole passage. How poorly beside Sir Walter's art in this matter show certain modern attempts to translate folk-tale, and Tennyson, and the Bible into what some people choose to call "Braid Scots."[1] These foolish persons have found it convenient to forget, if they ever knew, the testimony of Burns on this heresy. In a letter by him, perhaps the only one of his written in this "Braid Scots," addressed to William Nicol of the Edinburgh High School,[2] this Scot of Scots, who could use the Doric as no other could, shows what a fake such prose must be. The letter is good evidence, even if it be a deliberate travesty. "Kind honest-hearted Willie," it begins, "I'm sitten doun here after seven-and-forty miles ridin', e'en as forjesket and forniaw'd as a forfoughten cock, to gie ye some notion o' my land-lowper-like stravaiguin sin the sorrowfu' hour that I sheuk hands and parted wi' auld Reekie. My auld ga'd gleyde o' a meere has huchyall'd up hill and doun brae, in Scotland and England, as teugh and birnie as a vera deil wi'

[1] See further on this in the next chapter. The passage from *Redgauntlet* may some day run—'For whatna time Steenie lay in a dwawm he daurna jalouse,' etc.

[2] Carlisle, 1st June, 1787. Burns calls it a "Scots fragment." See Chambers, *Life and Works of Robert Burns*, ed. Wallace, ii. 119.

me." And so it proceeds, with each sentence freely sprinkled with 'poutherie,' 'smeddum,' 'rumblegumtion,' and the like from the glossarial pepper-pot.

When old Henry Scrimger excused himself in 1572 that "the Scotts Tung is now forgett with me, speciallie in writting,"[1] he was not speaking only for himself and those who had been long out of Scotland and had become "acquantit with strainge fassiouns of leving," but for many good people at home. As time passed and these lost their Latin, no compensation came to Scots against the ever-invading English, except in verse, and there only when it dealt with domestic pathos and humour or with satire. Even now the northern singers must be shepherds of the Ochils and their songs must remind us of Burns and his stanza or of the *fioriture* of *Whistle Binkie*. It is a modest ambition at best. This narrowing and hardening in verse is perhaps the fate of all vernacular literatures as they become more dialectal, especially in conditions such as grew up in Scotland ; but the refusal of all experience worth the name in drama and prose is surely exceptional.

[1] In a letter to the Regent Mar, printed in Buchanan, *Opera*, II (Epist. viii.).

CHAPTER V

THE PROBLEM OF DIALECT

In concluding this sketch of the forces which interrupted the development of the vernacular, we are tempted to ask whether Scottish literature, in the more complex conditions of modern life, can recover, or should try to recover, what it has declined or forgotten. The question involves us sooner or later in the problem of dialect, of which we had a hint at the close of the preceding chapter, but we may find it useful, by way of preliminary, to combine and summarize what has been said of the lets and hindrances to its literary expansion. It would appear that the strongly negative result which we have described is the effect of three habits, or, it may be, intentions, which, though of varying power, have generally coexisted.

The first expresses itself in the desire to eliminate the literary *differentiae*, to accept new ways, and to throw out, steadily, what remains of native quality. This, as has been pointed out, is in marked contrast with the Scot's general atti-

tude to other intellectual and social problems. It begins with the Chaucerian idolatry of the fifteenth century, and hardly ends with the war against Scotticism in the late eighteenth. It is seldom a reasonable, or reasoned, receptiveness. It is a hankering after new models, not because they are good models—for Scotland has not always followed the best—but because they are strange. However strong may be the national self-reliance, and, in the modern period, the self-satisfaction, these certainly have never been prevailing virtues of the literature.

The second, apparently but not really contradictory to the first, is the retrospective habit. This affects the matter and sentiment of the literature more than the form. We have seen how the historical interest rather than the literary—the history that is *in* the literature—won a hearing for the Muse, how the antiquarianism of the poets persisted from first to last, and, in spite of a strong bias to the immediate and real, and notwithstanding the individual vigour of certain writers, shackled northern verse to certain well-defined conventions. Literature is always looking back, shaking out the old garments, rummaging the old stores of subjects and forms. Its work is for the most part tasks of editorship; even Burns is a sublime example of the art of continuation. When, in the late eighteenth century, England turned to the new, for

the enjoyment of what had not been felt before, or had been long forgotten, Scotland turned to the past, because it was the past and her past. Then in the passion of recovery she seemed to find a national quality in everything that belonged to that past and to claim for her literature a formal tradition of its own, unconcerned how often it had borrowed and exchanged one artifice for another, or how at that very time it was never busier in imitating the South. A literature which thus recoils upon itself, not so much under stress of sentiment as under that of mistaken literary authority, is in difficulties. These some present-day enthusiasts too willingly overlook.

There is, in the third place, the curtailment of literary experience. At no stage of its career has the Scots vernacular enjoyed the freedom in range which every literature claims as necessary to progress and security. Whatever reputation may be achieved in certain kinds or through the brilliance of individual poets will not compensate for weakness or silence in others. To have given the world its best ballads, a great body of song, and Burns, may be honour enough; but a literature does not live on old repute or by imitative ingenuity, and one which has declined the discipline of drama and prose, and has prescribed a narrow area to its verse, must reckon with itself if it fail to meet others on equal terms. This, too,

our modern regenerators appear to be unwilling to consider.

The effect of these habits upon Scottish literature is clear. Only two writers, Burns and Scott, have done anything to loosen this triple grip—both unconsciously, and the former with no permanent aid to the victim. For our admiration of Burns's genius, whether in its appeal, or, in Stevenson's phrase, in its 'art of writing well,' is the admiration of individual power; and popular opinion may be excused its persistent concern in him as a great personality. But when this homage goes further and proclaims, as it has the right to proclaim, that he is also great because he is so expressive, not merely of the world's heart, but of national sentiment, the historian of literature is given his opportunity of explaining why he did so little to enlarge the range of the vernacular. Though it is to his honour that he gathered together so much of the old that was good, or potentially good, and gave new life to it, he did little to stimulate a wider literary ambition. He edited supremely well and aroused his countrymen to a consciousness of things they had but poorly understood. If he gave them some confidence in their literary ambitions, he directed them, or they chose to be directed, to a narrow round of subject and form, to be worked and reworked, by a sort of law of permutations and combinations. He is the end

of a process: genius is expressing itself in terms of what has gone before. As a literary force—and apart from all question of his place in the humanitarian reaction of the closing century—he is retrospective, as the Makars were, and the Jacobeans, and Ramsay of the Revival, and all before him. How truly this strength, this expressive power, so justly acclaimed, was the denial of incentive rather than the promise of new life is sorrowfully told in the later record of verse. Before him, even though the literature suffered from the dulling habits to which attention has been drawn, some change might have come as a reward for the discipline endured, some fresh outlook, at the bidding of writers not so richly endowed as he was; and he himself, in other circumstances, might have used his powers to such an end. He made the best, the very best, of what had been, and there the matter ended. He completed the edifice, and men admired, and have gone on admiring and declining the hope of admiring anything else. All efforts since his are but his in little or in part. There is one model, and he is that model. Posterity is too pleased or too awed; she has made a sacred book of him, and all that she dare allow herself is to assume the solemn duty of commentator. So it has fallen out that an inspired mind, instead of moving later generations of poets to more vigorous and varied endeavour, has by reason of its own strength

become the strictest barrier to emancipation. It is a nice speculation that had Burns not been so great, later Scots verse might not have been quite so poor; and another, that but for him it might have, by some good chance, shaken itself free from the historical and formal incubus. Like his own Captain Grose he took "the antiquarian trade," and by his influence on literature—perhaps, as has already been said, by the very force of his individuality—diverted the remaining energies to the collecting of the "auld nick-nackets" of the form and subject and custom of verse. *Orpheus Caledonius* by looking back has been denied his Eurydice.

With Scott the case is different, and we may complete the paradox begun in speaking of the antiquary Burns, by saying that he who has been so often chidden for the sorry business of buff-jerkins is the only great Scottish writer who has given to literature the courage of adventure. There is no need to repeat that his great gift to his age and to ours is the sense of movement, offered not merely in the romantic stir which touches the most *blasé* reader, but in the general provocative quality of his work. The most 'antiquarian' places in his verse and prose do not smell so mustily of the museum as we think. We are too ready to take his men in armour as mere suits of steel, decorating his story as if it were a corridor

at Abbotsford ; or to be bored by his erudition in architectural 'whigmaleeries.' Knights encased cap-à-pie walk slowly and ride heavily, too slowly for the six-cylinder fancy of the present day ; and our literary slumming in 'by-streets' and the Potteries has scheduled all this mouldering feudalism for removal under the Improvement Acts. Taste may change, but criticism must not be blind. Though Scott in his creation of a new *genre* takes history for his motive, he does not treat it as mere reminiscence, or lack vivacity in the telling of his story. He is not the slave of a literary tradition. If we allow that he is Janus-faced, let us remember the face that is next us, and that the light is upon it. He has had better reward than Burns has had in his following. He has not had the personal homage which wise men and not a few fools have rendered to the other ; he has not been so 'expressive' of the things of which the common man, indifferent to Burns's greater claims as a writer, delights to be reminded, as his forefathers so delighted. Time and an intoxicate vocabulary have not given him Scottites, as they have given Burnsites to vex the memory of the Bard. He is not Scottish in any parochial sense, though no one knew Scotland better. We measure his greatness by that influence of literary enlightenment, which, both for his own country-men and for a greater public on the Continent,

not only established the Novel securely, but in the practice of his craft suggested so many fresh forms for later hands. If the editorial epitaph on Robert Fergusson, "with him Scots Poetry now sleeps," may, with critical accuracy, be postdated for praise of a more famous successor, we must find other words for Scott. He died as the seed dies—when the burgeon springs.

These reflections help our approach to the question of the present-day position and hopes of the vernacular. Discussion has led to some confusion of thought and bad temper. It is not easy to adjust the claims of historical evidence and sentiment, especially when the latter is stimulated by influences which are in no sense literary. As public opinion has fallen more and more out of touch with the facts of the past, it has grown more sensitive to national affronts, and it would probably be less surprised to see a statue to Mr. Henley in the market-place of Dumfries than to be told how strangely it has misunderstood the literary traditions. Our modern sentimentalists would do well to remember that Scottish literature, perhaps more than any other, has made a virtue of disputing the tyranny of sentiment; that, almost with a show of personal feeling, it has resented the separation which politics and social habit have worked to establish between its artistic life and that of its

southern neighbour. Why the vernacular has faded, and why it is hard for it to recover some of the colour and character to be found in older poets, are not questions for persons who are only out for the scalps of centralizing Englishmen or partisan historians. The discussion has grown a little raucous on platforms, and it is time to impose some academic calm. It should be unnecessary to say that there cannot be any quarrel with the patriots about the richness of the Scottish vocabulary, its frequent superiority to English in both the spiritual and technical matters of poetic diction, its musical movement and suggestion, and generally, what have been called the "grand accommodations" in the craft of writing well.

It may be asked not merely whether it is within the competence of anyone to write or even speak a Scots which in all particulars, in the nuances of vocabulary and idiom, will be accepted as a standard from Kilmarnock to Aberdeen, but whether there is any modern writer, even Burns himself, who has worked in a uniform medium. The question forces itself upon us at once when we encounter the surprising travesty called 'Braid Scots,' to which passing reference was made at the close of the last chapter. It may be taken as seriously by us as most of the Latin prose of our classrooms must be by the shade of the long-suffering Cicero. We know how it is made, how our poeticule waddles

in good duck fashion through his Jamieson, snapping up fat expressive words with nice little bits of green idiom for flavouring. It is never literature, and it is certainly not Scots, unless we are so to call that menu-ingenuity which is shown at St. Andrew festivals in Massachusetts, or was written two hundred years ago in Watson's *Choice Collection*—

> "There will be Tartan, Dragen, and Brachen,
> And fouth of guid gappocks of Skate;
> Pow-sowdie and Drammock and Crowdie,
> And callour Nowt-feet in a plate;
> And there will be Partans and Buckies,
> Speldens and Haddocks anew;
> And singed Sheepheads and a Haggis,
> And Scadlips to sup till ye're fow."

Even when we turn from this prentice foolery to Hogg himself, in good verse like *The Witch of Fife*, we seem to see more artifice than a true-born Fifer can digest; and when we find Burns singing of a "tapetless ramfeesl'd hizzie" or of an old mare's caperings,

> "Till sprittie knowes wad rair't, an' riskit,
> An' slypet owre,"

we ask whether everybody in the poet's parish, and in every other parish outside the Edinburgh of Henry Mackenzie, was in better plight than some of our most learned to-day.

It is not difficult to put one's finger on some of the main causes of this mistaken or exaggerated attitude to dialect. There is, in the first place, the

confusion of the literary language with the colloquial. This, when once stated, does not require much argument. Pinkerton was apparently the first to touch on it, in one of his characteristically perverse 'prefaces.' "Some may say," he wrote in 1786, the year of the Kilmarnock edition of Burns, "the Scots themselves wish to abolish their dialect totally, and substitute the English; why then attempt to preserve the Scotish language? Let me answer that none can more sincerely wish a total extinction of the Scotish *colloquial* dialect than I do, for there are few modern Scoticisms which are not barbarisms. . . . Yet, I believe, no man of either kingdom would wish an extinction of the Scotish dialect in poetry. . . . It were to be wished that it should be regarded in both kingdoms equally only as an ancient and a poetical language, and nothing can take it so much out of the hands of the vulgar as a rigid preservation of the old spelling. Were there no Scotish books that the common people in Scotland could read, their knowledge of the English would increase very rapidly. But while they are enraptured with Barbour's History of Bruce, Blind Hary's Life of Wallace, and the works of Sir David Lindsay, books to be found in modern spelling at this day in almost every cottage of Scotland, their old dialect will maintain its ground. Were these books to be published only in their original ortho-

graphy, not one in a hundred of the peasantry could read them; and of course they would be forced to read English. In short, the old Scotish poets ought to be regarded in the same light as Chaucer and the old English ones; and who suspects that the perusal of the latter can injure the purity of English conversation or writing? The contrary is so far true, that I will venture to say that a man who writes a language, without acquaintance with its early state, may compose well from chance, but never from intelligence. For knowledge of the primitive and progressive powers of words is the only solid foundation of that rich and terse style which posterity pronounces classic."[1] There is some wisdom in this very provocative passage, if only in pointing to the indefeasible rights of the literary dialect. In the period from the Revival to Burns the indifference to the mixing of the literary and colloquial had not been serious in its effects, for, as has been shown, the protest of the verse of that age was based upon an extremely rigid literary tradition. Burns, in spite of his addition of fresh colloquial elements, to which he gave infinite credit, was, as we have already seen, strongly rooted in that tradition. Though he borrowed from the unliterary speech, he somehow or other escaped the difficulties with which his contemporary Wordsworth encumbered himself,

[1] *Ancient Scotish Poems*, i. pp. xvii.-xviii.

when, in his protest against conventionality, he took over the untried and unpedigreed language of his dalesmen. But since Burns's time, the minors, careless of history and oblivious of the risks which his genius could take, have swept the vocabulary of each and every countryside into the granaries of the literary speech. The test of spelling reveals an interesting fact, that, whereas, with all allowance for the free habit of the early scribes, there is philological as well as ocular authority for the words which the poets of the Revival rehandled, the modern practitioner, within and without the canon of *Whistle Binkie*, is the most shameless amateur in such matters. He treats his text as if it were a lesson in accent, marked as a guide to a venturesome alien preparing a 'Scotch piece.' When a vernacular of national pretence is driven to these shifts, it makes sad confession of its literary hopes.

In the second place, the modern plea neglects consideration of the relationship of true dialect to changing conditions, intellectual and social. By these changes we mean more than the differences which grow up naturally and healthily in a progressive culture, when what is true of or good for one set of circumstances is not likely to be true of or good for a later age of different mood. This problem is more pathological, and it may be best explained by a passage from Ruskin, where, in reference to the verbal characteristics of Scott's style,

we read—"It has not generally been observed, either by their imitators [of the Waverleys] or the authors of different taste who have written for a later public, that there is a difference between the dialect of a language and its corruption. A dialect is formed in any district where there are persons of intelligence enough to use the language itself in all its fineness and force, but under the particular conditions of life, climate, and temper, which introduce words peculiar to the scenery, forms of word and idioms of sentence peculiar to the race, and pronunciations indicative of their character and disposition. Thus 'burn' (of a streamlet) is a word possible only in a country where there are brightly running waters, 'lassie,' a word possible only where girls are as free as the rivulets, and 'auld,' a form of the southern 'old,' adopted by a race of finer musical ear than the English. On the contrary, mere deteriorations, or coarse, stridulent, and, in the ordinary sense of the phrase, 'broad' forms of utterance, are not dialects at all, having nothing dialectic in them; and all phrases developed in states of rude employment, and restricted intercourse, are injurious to the tone and narrowing to the power of the language they affect. Mere breadth of accent does not spoil a dialect as long as the speakers are men of varied idea and good intelligence; but the moment the life is contracted by mining, millwork, or any oppressive and

monotonous labour, the accents and phrases become debased. It is part of the popular folly of the day to find pleasure in trying to write and spell these abortive, crippled, and more or less brutal forms of human speech."[1] This elaboration by Ruskin of his protest against the sins of modern life is directly applicable to the matter before us, for modern Scots has certainly reduced the literary values of the vernacular by the free intrusion of untested colloquialism. The conditions are denied under which, in an earlier culture, the springs of popular utterance trickled into the cisterns of national literature. It was easy to resist or regulate the inflow in a Scotland, when, as in the sixteenth century, the Scots-speaking population, all told, was barely one quarter of that of the modern city of Glasgow, and when only a very small fraction, and that well-knit and confirmed in tradition, professed or encouraged the craft of letters. Scots has lost this power of resistance, and, affecting the humanitarianism of Burns, its only pattern, has been generous to every 'randie gangrel' bit of shelta and clachan-slang. Some literatures have clamoured at times for an Aliens Act, and have felt themselves in need of protection against 'over-sea' fashion. Scotland, even when Ramsay thought she had a grievance, has, as we have observed, never shut her ports; and her free

[1] 'On the Old Road'; *Works*, ed. Cook, xxxiv. p. 293.

habit may have brought her good as well as harm. It is the wastrels of dialect and her own bad housewifery, which threaten to destroy her vernacular credit.

This leads to a third point, that there is no vernacular standard for literary purposes. No Scots ever printed or spoken can claim general authority. Burns presents not a few difficulties to his Aberdonian admirers, and they in turn perplex the good folk of the Lothians. The subdivision of dialect has persisted, in spite of the processes of natural decay and the pressure of English, by reason of frequent exercise in each variety to literary ends; and the limitation of this exercise to the casting and recasting of matters of the narrowest local interest has accentuated rather than blurred the differences. We can admire this dialectal pride in *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk*, in *Poems in the Buchan Dialect* (1787), in others in that of Kyle, or Mearns, or Merse, though we extend our sympathy to the connoisseurs in epic when they see *Ajax's Speech* and *Ulysses' Answer* in homely 'fa's' and 'fat's.' These ingenuities are good material for the philologers, whom we commiserate too when they wrestle with the phonetic conundrums of bucolics and 'sma' toun' printers. It is, however, another matter when we have to deal with modern enthusiasts, who draw freely from all quarters, and, making pretence of a

standard, jumble Ayrshire and East Neuk and Galloway and 'Stanehive' together, and translate the whole into 'fonetik,' for 'scientific' use on Teutonic gramophones. This make-believe cannot reduce the anarchy of dialect or give literary confidence to the vernacular. The day is long past for the realization of that ambition, if Scotland ever cherished it, and we may rest content with what we have, and pray that when the Muse is in no mood to try English she will not disturb the ancient peace of Balmaquhapple with the vanities of Kennaquhair.

Where, then, lies the hope of the Scottish vernacular, if it is not to succumb to English, and if it is to recover any of its credit against the travesties which pass with Cockneys and not a few misguided Northerners? Can it, at the best, have any other claim than as a *pastiche*, a rehandling of themes such as Burns took, in language such as he used and made literary? If not, then it is spent, and will go a-begging in the Poet's Corners of the country press; and its traditions will be left to the care of the scholarly and pious. Yet it may make compromise with its strong neighbour, as we shall see it has done now and then in the past.

We are reminded, at the outset, of a device, of the nature of a compromise, which Burns used not rarely, and which no one has managed better than

he. The readiest illustration is *Tam o' Shanter*, in which we have alternate layers, or a mosaic, of two styles. The most notable instance is near the beginning of the poem, when, after the 'familiar' picture of the "blethering, blustering, drunken blellum" and his "drouthy cronie," the poet suddenly falls to general reflection, and as suddenly falls into pure Southern.

> "But pleasures are like poppies spread:
> You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed;
> Or like the snow falls in the river,
> A moment white—then melts for ever;
> Or like the borealis race,
> That flit ere you can point their place;
> Or like the rainbow's lovely form
> Evanishing amid the storm."

And then at the mention of Tam—as if the very sound 'T-a-m' could not fail to play havoc with eighteenth century decorum—he recovers at once the accent and phrase of Alloway parish; and so continues, with little breaks here and there, till, after the din and rush, and the breathless moment when the "hellish legion" sallies forth

> "As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke,
> When plundering herds assail their byke,"

he goes on—

> "As open pussie's mortal foes,
> When, pop! she starts before their nose;
> As eager runs the market-crowd,
> When 'Catch the Thief!' resounds aloud:
> So Maggie runs, the witches follow,"

and concludes the episode, and the couplet, thus—

> " Wi' monie an eldritch skreich and hollo."

That this is by no means exceptional parquetry, the poem *To a Mountain Daisy*, with its wedge of English—

> " Such is the fate of artless maid,
> Sweet flow'ret of the rural shade," etc.,

or, even more strikingly, the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, shows very clearly. We are not here directly concerned with the literary propriety of this tartan-Scots, over which some critics have shaken their heads, or with the measure of Burns's success or failure. The immediate interest lies in the historical necessity of the compromise, showing either that Scots had so lost its hold that it could only be pressed into service, even during the Revival, in the very 'familiar' and realistic moments of the Muse, or, more truly, that it was, by reason of its domestic habit, ill at ease or quite at a nonplus in more ceremonial and reflective efforts.

We are, however, more immediately attracted by another kind of compromise, of subtler device, which has been tested and found good, and which appears to offer a way for the freer expression of nationality in style. It may be described as the delicate colouring of standard English with northern tints. And here it is well to remember

that the wisest patriotism does not seek to force on new and changed generations, and certainly not in literary matters, the rule of a tradition already outworn ; that the hope of continuing and increasing the vitality of a language or literature is undone by an affected antiquarianism ; that there is no working with tools which are blunt in the hands of Englishmen and foreigners, and of Scots themselves. When Scotland puts a premium upon antiquity or parochialism she confesses that she has lost so much, perhaps everything. Matters of scholarship may be left to scholarship, which will give them their due honour and point the historical lesson at appropriate times. Scotland wants no 'compulsory Scots' for her poets, as in Dublin they pretend to think they want compulsory Achill ; but she wants, and may earnestly pray for, a fuller realization of national sentiment in a regenerated art. Let Scots, in their literature, express the Scot that is in them, and believe that their artistic opportunity lies in something more than an occasional strut or frolic in the masquing-gear of 'Braid Scots.'

If this appear extravagant or be as gall to the Perfervids, they may be reminded of the testimony of certain Scottish writers who have some right to speak on this matter. We find a hint of it in Burns, when he tells George Thomson[1] that "there

[1] Letter to Thomson, 26th Jan., 1793.

is a naïveté, a pastoral simplicity, in a slight intermixture of Scots words and phraseology, which is more in unison—at least to my taste, and, I will add, to every genuine Caledonian taste—with the simple pathos or rustic sprightliness of our native music, than any English verses whatever." Scott offers corroboration in his correspondence in 1817 with his friend Daniel Terry about the writing of a play *The Baron of Plenton*. In discussing the details, he says: "I think Scotland is entitled to have something on the stage to balance Macklin's two worthies.[1] You understand the dialect will be only tinged with the national dialect—not that the Baron is to speak broad Scotch, while all the others talk English."[2] This is a hint of a purpose which Scott keeps in mind throughout all his work; and it is interesting to find him thinking of it in connection with drama, where direct dialogue and stage realism demand a fuller allowance. Even in the novel, and especially in the conversational passages, some of this extra allowance might be claimed; yet there he takes it rather sparingly, and holds by his conviction that a dialect tincture is the best. Each one of his novels supplies its hundred instances. If the reader require an illustration, let him turn again to the passage from 'Wandering Willie's Tale,' in *Redgauntlet*, quoted near

[1] Sir Archy MacSarcasm and Sir Pertinax MacSycophant.

[2] Lockhart, *Life of Scott*, v. 202.

the end of last chapter. No one can miss the *extensive* effect of the sprinkling of Scots-spelt words, securing through the gently-suggested and rising accent of the passage a complete impression of northern quality and setting. A more generous indulgence, especially if accompanied with polite hints of phonetic values, as in our modern 'Braid Scots,' would have been a distraction, if not the undoing of the whole. The parochial antiquaries are welcome to their view that Scott's art is but the bastardy of language. We prefer to think that by this handling of words he promised youth and adventure to a literature, for which some people could hope for no happier fate than decent burial. The excellence of his method stands out clearly when it is contrasted with Hogg's, even in the least extravagant passages in the *Noctes*. There is frank recognition of the device in R. L. Stevenson, though at times he swings away in a clatter of dialect, distressful to southerners and foreigners. The author of *The Little Minister* perhaps relies less upon it in his task of putting the stranger at his ease with the gossips of Thrums. We see it, with the new interest of a Gaelic setting, in the craftsmanship of the author of *John Splendid*.

One word may be added, by way of epilogue to this discussion, that the final test of the method must always be literary. Every form derives its

value from its artistic necessity and appropriateness. Art is free to select, not always free to use; and no one may assume that he serves her ends rightly by a mere collector's fury for things that are old or for things that are 'vulgar,' in order that new thrills may be given to our jaded English. Why should the Scot want to preserve an outworn vocabulary more than the English or French have preserved theirs, or make the speech of the good folk of Balmaquhapple, Easter or Wester, the criterion of diction? It is no disrespect to Chaucer or William Barnes that poet X writes as his public likes him to write; and no slight to tradition to be strenuous in making the best of what lies to hand. But, while so much may be said for general argument, no lover of literature, even if he brings small historical knowledge to the matter, dare overlook the aid of both kinds, the old and the dialectal, in the enrichment of the modern medium. What Spenser gained by archaism, lesser poets and later ages may emulate to advantage. Scottish literature, if rightly guided, is not likely to be indifferent to this opportunity. As it has ever been a great borrower from neighbours, it may well, in later conditions, take freely from its own forgotten riches, especially from that "almost unrivalled provision of poetical *clichés*," the "stock phrases which Heaven knows who first minted and which will pass till they are worn out

of all knowledge."[1] But it must borrow, as southern English has borrowed and will continue to borrow, with the authority of the Muse, by literary methods, and to literary ends.

There might be little harm in the view that dialect is the symbol and test of all that counts for nationality, and that the more assiduous is the recovery of the past or the cherishing of colloquial forms the more secure will that nationality be, if it were certain that we get behind externals and come into touch with essential Scotticism. Unfortunately, the Perfervid coteries are wholly absorbed in a ritual of protest, and that ritual not altogether of the best, or reasonably explanatory of itself. Some day they may understand the attitude of Scott, whose patriotism they dare not dispute, and give his method its due. Perhaps we trouble overmuch about the future. Should it be the destiny of Scottish literature to lose its individual place and at last forget the full Doric and the traditional themes, there need be no wringing of hands, as if nationality were lost and the generous spring of Scotticism had run dry. The passing will not be as the last flicker of a spent force, but the completion of an Act of Union which has been long in the making, and under which northern genius, trained in a school too narrow for its powers, may, in the fuller enjoyment of an old comradeship, find

[1] Saintsbury, *Essays in English Literature*, i., p. 48.

play for these powers and indulge a growing confidence. There is small risk, the Muse helping, of this being vexatious to those, southern or northern, who dislike the aroma of the Kailyard and resent the artifice of 'Braid Scots,' or to the purists who must protest, with better reason than Tom Moore did, against

"Scotch, English, and slang in promiscuous alliance."[1]

[1] So Moore, of Galt's 'rabble of words' (*Poems*, Oxford edition, p. 621). De Quincey, while allowing to the Scots dialect picturesqueness and value in "characteristic expression," especially in Scott's novels, asks "what man in his senses would employ it in a grave work, and speaking in his own person?" (*On Style*, Part II., *Works*, 1897, vol. x. p. 188.)

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW POETIC FORCES

PERSISTENT and varied as were the influences which acted on Scottish literature throughout its history, they never succeeded in obliterating the family traits, even at times when the affectation of foreign taste was at its height. This may not surprise the stranger who has not made particular study of its history. Englishmen will say that this is as it should be, for they are aware that, though exile and travel and cosmopolitan culture may produce a remarkable conformity with the manner of others, the bases of national character remain unshaken; and they have learned that, fight as Scots will over theology and politics, the sense of brotherhood is never lost, and that the bickerings about Kirk and State are but tonic or exercise. The South has long made merry over this tenacity and 'clannishness,' and no one need be so wanting in humour as to quarrel with the ancient hyperbolical jests about 'brither' Scotticism. The literature shows a like contrariness—at once the most acquisitive and the most self-possessed; running after alien

fashions, in apparent discontent with what national pride should find at home, and yet holding to its own; strong enough to offer to the very neighbour from which it borrows so much, and even to Europe at large, new interests and new methods.

It was, of course, only in modern times, certainly not before the eighteenth century, that Scottish literature found itself in a position to act upon English literature, and through it upon others. We speak only of the vernacular, not of that medieval and humanist Latin in which many in and beyond Scotland won great reputation, and in which they were so often more at home than in their native speech. Nor shall we consider whether hints are to be found of spiritual and artistic differences between the Majors and Buchanans and the other provincials of the great empire of Latinity. Verse, even in its most traditional forms—in the eclogue, psalm, and other exercises practised in the *Delitiae*—might disclose not a little of that national quality which juts out here and there, rather jaggedly, in the pedantries and rancours of historical or theological prose; but of influence, in any strict sense, there could be none. All that the world knew of the Scottish origin of these citizens of a common empire was probably no more than the title-page confession—*Scotus*; and this, in earlier days at least, was poor security against Hibernian claims.

Just at the stage when Scottish literature seemed to yield up its individuality to its southern neighbour, it began for the first time to exert a direct influence on the teachers from whom it had learnt so much. When in the eighteenth century the Scot had become almost morbidly conscious of his provincialism, he found, by a strange turn of fortune, that these teachers were now his pupils. The situation is not so paradoxical as it would appear. The period of receptivity had been one of preparation, a time of discipline rather than of barter or surrender. No literature has ever found its place without such experience. The plodding translators gave England her prose; the endless practice in the un-English intricacies of the Italian sonnet gave the Elizabethans their free enjoyment of English verse. As in that English training there was no sacrifice of English quality, so even in the most extravagantly Anglicized Scots the northern character was not lost. When towards the close of the century the full-toned Doric had won repute beyond Scotland, there was no question, on either side of the Border, of debauched Scotticism. It has always appeared strange that a modern and rather wrong-headed patriotism, as voiced by literary historians, greater and lesser, should be so depressed by this Anglomania, this trudging to London of the Thomsons and Macphersons, this inordinate deference to

things Addisonian and Johnsonian, and should feel it a duty to make apology for the Humes and Robertsons of a degenerate Edinburgh. It is forgotten by these sad people, and by many unbiassed persons too who should know better, that England's welcome to the new-comers was not offered in the old schoolmasterly manner. Her literature was sensitive to this Scottish compliment, and by it, as well as by the less effective and less novel devoirs of Ireland and Wales, was encouraged to exchange English self-content for British responsibilities and aspirations. It was Sawney the Scot who brought this awakening to England, and to Europe the knowledge of another England, such as Shakespeare's age or Dryden's could not have foreseen or understood. In this transaction, far more than in the vaunt of having placed a Scottish dynasty on the English throne, or of having avenged the loss of some independence by capturing high places and honours in the South, should lamenting Scots find consolation and even pride. We must discard the heresy that calls the eighteenth century in Scotland the Age of Apostasy, and smile at the contemporary French distress at the literary disgrace of the old ally. "L'Écosse," says the *Encyclopédie*, "a été redoutable tant qu'elle n'a pas été incorporée avec l'Angleterre ; mais, comme dit M. de Voltaire, un état pauvre, voisin d'un riche, devient vénal à la

longue; et c'est aussi le malheur que l'Écosse éprouve."[1] The truer reading now is that it was only after incorporation that Scotland felt her literary strength. Even contemporaries might have seen that whatever English satirists and angry place-hunters said of the beggarly Scots who poured into Lord Bute's London, there was an honest welcome to the northern Muse.

So it fell out that it was only during this period of 'Shame' that Scotland and her literature became known beyond the Borders and across the seas. She had, it is true, great reputation abroad as the nursery of many famous in learning, soldiering, and commerce. In some places, as in the Low Countries and Poland, the burgher-folk must have had a sneaking respect for the country which produced the astute merchants and chapmen, who, like foraging ants, passed through their markets year in year out. There was something mysterious about the little kingdom away in the North-East, something which invited a condescending interest in the foreigner, something provocative of gossip which the picturesque fancy of these wandering patriots and scholar-exiles could not let slip. We know how successfully the arch-romancer Boece, and others in a more stolid way, improved upon the national history, to the great delectation of the Continent, and to the deluding of men of the

[1] Art. *Écosse*, by the Chevalier de Jaucourt (ed. 1755, vol. v.).

world like Erasmus and Paulus Jovius; how, by lucky accident as well as by careful handling of editors and printers, Scotland was honoured so nobly in Blaeu's folios, the universal Bayle, Moreri and Hoffman, the Elzevir *Respublicae* and the French *Délices*. There was never any lack of material of the 'terror and wonder' kind, or of embroiderers and retailers, both home and foreign, to supply all demands. So it mattered little when in later days the historical bag-wigs set themselves to throw out all the stories of phantom kings and regicides from before the Flood or spoil the romance of what could not be proved mythical. The *praefervidum ingenium Scotorum*, of which the Poitevin André Rivet was the first to speak,[1] had so heralded itself in Europe that, in whatever way and at whatever time it might express itself with confidence in literature, it was not likely to pass unnoticed. Its greatest opportunity came in the later eighteenth century. Then literature both in England and abroad shows unmistakably in its record an awakened interest in ideas Scottish in origin or Scottish in nurture.

Scotland had her chance when the neo-classical régime in England began to totter. Although she maintained in the critical atmosphere of her anglicized Edinburgh[2] the authority of that régime,

[1] See J. Hill Burton, *The Scot Abroad*, p. 198.

[2] See next chapter.

especially in her prose, she showed in many ways in her verse, both in the work of the home-poets of the Revival from Ramsay to Burns and in that of the poets who established themselves in England or sought an English audience, that she had thrown in her lot with the rebels. So valiantly did she proclaim the new gospel of nature and romantic freedom, that it is not extravagant to allow her the main share in directing the change, though England was already restless and had broken silence. Her three gifts were the *Seasons* and *Fingal* and the *Ballads*, and through these the Revival discovered its full purpose.

James Thomson is now forgotten, except in the text-books, those graveyards of letters which tell the passer-by little more than that here lies one poet and there another, each of some account in his own generation. Few, even of the professional brethren in England, read the *Seasons*, and abroad there is now no Madame Roland who would choose the book for solace, no Chénier or Rousseau to praise, no Prévost or Voltaire or Grimm to honour it as a classic. Thomson is gone with the ineffable Gessner, and we seem to be content to leave his memory to the school-anthologists and the Schmedings.[1] This may be the way of all poets except

[1] *Jacob Thomson, ein vergessener Dichter des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1889).

the greatest, and it is nobody's concern to try to galvanize what time has palsied. But no reputation of this kind, however soon and willingly it is forgotten, passes away without exerting some influence, and it is the business of the historical student to extort from the self-possessed modern some acknowledgement of the debt.

Thomson's share in the coming change, or his consciousness of the part he played, must not be exaggerated. His mind was as lazy as his body, too comfortably slow to allow him to play the reformer. With all his worries, he was not dissatisfied with his world, as Wordsworth was sometimes with *his*. We may say that it was his indifference, or habit of compromise, which was one of the causes, if not the main cause, of his successful insinuation into the affections of his age, as, on the other hand, it was one of the reasons for his neglect by the next. How strongly he is on the side of the older order is shown in the artificiality of his verse, even in the *Seasons* and *Castle of Indolence* ; certainly at every turn in his minor pieces, deservedly forgotten ; but chiefly in his choice of trivial subjects, by which he vexed not a few foreign admirers, in his didactic vein, his historical interludes, his overdone and lifeless epithets, his dull Miltonic echoes and studio-made phrasing and vocabulary, his apostrophes, his reminiscences of Virgil and Lucretius. The love

of his age for him was the love of these things, and it may be doubted whether there were many who had eyes to see any difference between him and the poet of Windsor Forest. We know that the *Seasons* was admired for its 'philosophical reflections,' and for its panel subjects of the Musidora type, and for these alone, by many of the best.

Yet in essentials, in the poems by which he would choose to be remembered, he is alien to the prevailing taste. He is too careless in construction, and, in the marshalling of his ideas, not seldom too unrestrained, to be counted a loyal son of Twickenham. Johnson noted these things and found his diction "in the highest degree florid and luxuriant," [1] just as, in the poet's student days, the academic authorities at Edinburgh had found his theological exercises. There is risk of our making too much of these as hints of the romantic enthusiasm which was about to undo the precisians of English letters, for there is little passion in Thomson, and, when he is either unkempt or overdressed, the frolic is merely intellectual. If this were the only measure of contrast with his contemporaries, it would prove no more than that he was an indifferent artist. There was no novelty in this, and Johnson's London was not likely to be misled. But there was something new—nothing

[1] *Lives*, 'Thomson.'

less, as Time would prove, than a fresh gospel—in his choice of subject; and, even in his artificial verse, the discovery of a new instrument. These things, the turning to Nature for more than decorative purposes and the achievement of his blank verse, are commonplaces with which those who know least of Thomson are not unfamiliar.

It is not necessary, even were it historically just, to claim for Thomson a surpassing share in this appreciation of Nature among his contemporaries. We may allow to the most confirmed formalist of that age and every age intimate moments with the simple harmonies and colours of the countryside, and it would not be hard to collect evidence of this in the early eighteenth century. But a rather cheap criticism, based partly on a misconception of Wordsworth's misconception of that century, has cried down Thomson's credit by declining to see in his work any genuine enthusiasm for Nature, or any novelty in his open-air studies. This view neglects certain considerations, that Thomson's choice of a new subject, as a relief from the trivial and artificial delights of his time, was deliberate, and even enforced by critical argument; that early personal devotion, not mere nausea of town-elegances or the promise of fresh rhetorical opportunity, dictated that choice; and that no one is to be denied the honour of having given us something, because we know that thing so well and have for-

gotten the source of our knowledge. On this last point, Johnson, with characteristic nobility of judgement, has said the last word. "The reader of the *Seasons* wonders that he never saw before what Thomson shows him, and that he never yet has felt what Thomson impresses."[1] We are ungrateful to him as we are to his century, which is so 'dull' and 'prosaic' because it had the talent of making things so clear. As to deliberate purpose, the Preface to the second edition of *Winter* may stand for evidence. "Let poetry," says Thomson, "once more be restored to her ancient truth and purity; . . . let her exchange her low, venal, trifling subjects for such as are fair, useful, and magnificent." What he calls, in characteristic figure, the "wintry world of letters" must be lightened and warmed by "the choosing of great and serious subjects." And he proceeds, "I know no subject more elevating, more amusing, more ready to awake the poetical enthusiasm, the philosophical reflection, and the moral sentiment, than the works of Nature. . . . How gay looks the Spring! how glorious the Summer! how pleasing the Autumn! and how venerable the Winter! But there is no thinking of these things without breaking out into Poetry; which is, by-the-by, a plain and undeniable argument of their superior excellence. . . . The best . . . Poets

[1] *Lives*, 'Thomson.'

have been passionately fond of retirement and solitude. The wild romantic country was their delight." The third point, his personal devotion to Nature, is made clear in the story of his boyhood and undergraduate days, from the time when, as a stripling, and the pet of Robert Riccaltoun, a Border farmer, he was stirred by that worthy's verses on *Winter* to his student efforts in the *Edinburgh Miscellany*.

> "I hate the clamours of the smoky towns,
> But much admire the bliss of rural clowns." [1]

And again,

> "But grant, ye Powers, that it may be my lot
> To live in peace, from noisy towns remote," [2]

—a very proper prayer for a young poet dedicated to the service of Nature and fretting to escape from his academic prison in Auld Reekie. If this prayer was strangely answered by his being plunged into the literary life of the southern capital and by his remaining too happy or too indolent to gird at Fate, he never had any misgivings about these early fervours. Even though the compliment of popularity tempted him to revise his first *Winter*, to the loss, as Johnson rightly thought, of some of its 'race,' he never fell to be a mere singer of "pendant gardens in Cheapside." [3] By a triumph of insinuation (for thus may we excuse the

[1] *Of a Country Life* (1720). [2] *Ib.*
[3] See the Preface to the 2nd edition of *Winter*.

rhetoric and diction which the romantic poets could not or would not understand, and of the usefulness of which Thomson himself was not fully aware) the *Seasons* disclosed a new motive, just as the *Castle of Indolence*, notwithstanding its serio-comic vein, showed the accent and touch of Spenser's romanticism which scores of 'Imitations' had missed. Though Thomson failed to give the soul of the scene as later Nature poets have done, he at least painted the scene with the sensitiveness of one who had lived in it and learnt its charms, past forgetting. We can forgive his Scottish 'pawkiness' in conforming to his hosts' humour for moral bombast and ceremonious epithet, and may doubt whether any one of his poet-critics, had he been born before his time and had he proclaimed an earlier gospel of Olney or of Rydal Mount, would have fared half so well in his mission to the 'ingenious' of Fleet Street. England had to have her *Ciders* and *Winter Solstices* before her *Tasks*. What she would have had, and when, and how, if Thomson had not let in the northern breezes and shown the northern colours, would be matter for a chapter in literary history strangely different from the existing record.

Thomson brought to English literature not merely a new interest in the details of country-life, but a new atmosphere. The novelty of the second lay in discovering for English letters some liking

for the sterner and gloomier aspects, which runs through all Scottish literature from Douglas onwards.[1] Winter rules Thomson's year. Of Winter his first teacher, Riccaltoun, sang; of Winter Thomson first sang, and sang best. When there is a touch of home-sickness in later years, it is for the shadows and storm of his Teviotdale. The minute realism of his *Spring* and *Summer* —the "sweet-briar hedges" and "smell of dairy," the glow of the garden, the "sound of sharpening scythe," the mower in the "humid hay," the summer pool—might have passed unnoticed, but for his bolder studies in the greys of Nature. The trail of the tempest is over all. The pleasures of Spring are the relief from the "kindred glooms" and "cogenial horrors"; the harvest-time is consolation against coming stress. His first picture is the breaking of a rain-storm—

> "First, joyless rains obscure
> Drive through the mingling skies with vapour foul,
> Dash on the mountain's brow, and shake the woods
> That grumbling wave below. The unsightly plain
> Lies a brown deluge; as the low bent clouds
> Pour flood on flood, yet unexhausted still
> Combine, and, deepening into night, shut up
> The day's fair face." [2]

Here lay his tonic value. When he indulges this mood he is most opposed to the classical calm of his age, whether in England or abroad, and in his

[1] See Chapter ii, *supra*. [2] *Winter*, 73-80.

manner least aureate and conventional. The late M. Texte, when quoting the passage from *Spring* on sunshine after rain, asked, "What French author wrote in this style in 1730?"; or, what German poet before Uz in 1742, or before Kleist, whose *Frühling* (1749) was a compliment to Thomson? It may be doubted whether English and European literature would have taken so early and so fully to the new subject of Nature, in the spring and summer settings which more genial lands could understand, had it not been stirred by the sterner sketches of the northern poet. But, apart from this provocative aid to naturalism, the *Seasons* directed European taste to the 'matter' of the North, and stimulated what M. Jules Lemaître has described as the *accès de septentriomanie* of the eighteenth century.[1] Scotland, thus introduced to the Continent, was not slow in making a stronger appeal.

Ossian has long ago retired to his misty hill-tops, and James Macpherson, who conjured him forth to vex the world of letters as no ghost has done, before or since, has 'tholed his assize.' It is hard for us to understand what a pother the son of Fingal caused in the critical coteries, or to measure the effects, in some ways for good, of this fiction, so impudently conceived, upon the literature of

[1] *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 126 (Dec. 1894), p. 847.

Europe. When we turn over the minutes of the literary and philosophical societies of the period,[1] we find no subjects so persistent as this Ossianic poetry and the problem of its authenticity. In England the question involved men like Gray and Johnson; abroad, the publication of the book was hailed as the birthday of a new era. Latin and Teutonic art welcomed it in identical terms, echoing or corroborating Blair, who proclaimed it the equal of Homer. Ossian *is* the modern Homer, said Madame de Staël. To Klopstock he is the rival of Homer; to Voss "Ossian of Scotland is greater than Homer of Ionia"[2]: and Herder, having at last found his soul's desire, had thoughts of going to Scotland that he might be touched more closely by this inspired writing. All this and more, especially of the enthusiasm in Germany, is familiar,[3] and need not be repeated; but one or two reflections suggest themselves not impertinently.

In the first place, the Scotticism, as found by Herder in Macpherson's pages, was illusory. If,

[1] For example the Speculative Society of Edinburgh University, of which Scott and so many of the northern youth who became famous were members.

[2] As he was to the sorrowful Werther: "Ossian hat in meinem Herz den Homer verdrängt."

[3] See Texte, *J.-J. Rousseau, passim.* It would appear that in our own day 'Ossian' (in translation) is, or was, accepted in Italian schools as the "standard 'English' classic"—a pedagogical enormity very distressing to a correspondent in *The Spectator* of 26th Oct. 1918.

as their author claimed, the Ossianic poems are far removed from the fantastic work of the Irish bards, they are not any nearer, in trait and sentiment, to what must pass for Scottish, even if by that we mean only Gaelic. No literary critic nowadays could, even were all clues of provenance and language to fail, mistake this Ossian and his brethren as representative. The Dean of Lismore would have had no doubts; and there would have been fewer in the classical Edinburgh of Blair's day willing to be convinced of the ancient and abiding Scottish *timbre* of the epics, had not the contempt shown by Johnson and other Englishmen made defence of Macpherson and his work a plain matter of national honour. Had these good people been as wise as posterity, they would have seen that Scotland's credit in the matter was based not on the local or representative character of Macpherson's work, but on the larger issue, that it voiced the new mood of Romanticism, and in terms which immediately won the attention of every literature ready to break with the ennui of Rule. If, as Percy said of the *Fragments*, there is "not one local or appropriated image in the whole," there is at least genius, and genius which promised a new dispensation.

This suggests a second observation, that Macpherson, even more than Thomson, was unconscious of the trend of his effort toward Roman-

ticism. Like the lowlander he was attracted by the homiletic and rhetorical fashions, which not a few in England were already of opinion "had been carried too far."[1] Isaac Taylor's dainty vignette on the title-page of *Temora*, with its Greekish hero, helmeted, and reclining as the gods do on Olympus, tells us how author and artist interpreted their mission.[2] The quaint protest in the 'Dissertation' which Macpherson prefixed to the piece shows, notwithstanding its hint of his sensitiveness to the situation, how thoroughly he failed to understand the true direction of his work. In answering, with a complacency so astounding that Johnson must have smiled, the "absurd opinion" which "appropriated" the "compositions of Ossian" to "the Irish nation," he describes the Irish poems as "entirely writ in that romantic taste, which prevailed two ages ago." He proceeds: "Giants, enchanted castles, dwarfs, palfreys, witches, and magicians form the whole circle of the poet's invention. The celebrated Fion could scarcely move from one hillock to another, without encountering a giant or being entangled in the circles of a magician. Witches, on broomsticks, were continually hovering round him, like crows; and he had freed enchanted virgins in every valley in

[1] Joseph Warton, Preface to *Odes*, 1746.

[2] And Wale's vignette (engraved by Taylor) in the earlier volume *Fingal* may have encouraged the 'Homeric' commonplaces about the ancient bard.

Ireland. In short, Fion, great as he was, had but a bad sort of life of it."[1] He appears to have this in mind when in a note to *Cath-Loda*, in the same volume, he disparages the traditional *tales* of the Highlands, where he holds there "are more stories of giants, enchanted castles, dwarfs, and palfreys than in any country in Europe."[2] Clearly, he had convinced himself that the *poems* —the 'original' documents of his affection—were immune from all romantic disease. Ten years later he actually threatened to impose the 'classical' couplet on his spasmodic prose. Europe, indifferent alike to his deceit and his wrong-headed criticism, thanked him, past the dreams of more ambitious bards, for his gift of Romance. If the mystery of his popularity becomes a little less mysterious when we know how well prepared the public was, even in England, and as far back as the time of Temple's *Essay of Heroic Virtue*, how greedy that public had grown, and that the things which it coveted were not those which he offered with most ceremony, we may still be allowed to wonder, when we think of what Romanticism has

[1] *Temora*, 1763, p. xxiii. In every way, in the interests of his peculiar patriotism, and the originality of his work, he resisted Irish pretensions—even to the renaming of Finn MacCoul (so known to Dunbar and every Scottish writer) as Fingal. Irish scholarship showed temper, and a triangular duel ensued between Scot, Englishman, and Irishman, to the increasing of Macpherson's credit not a little.

[2] *ib.*, p. 184 *n.*

meant since his day, how this impudent antiquarian fraud fared so well, and how men, by no means fools, came to believe that thus "Imagination dwelt many hundred years ago in all her pomp on the cold and barren mountains of Scotland."[1]

So, in the third place, we may ask ourselves, are these poems Scottish in any other way than may be assumed by us from our knowledge of the nationality of their author and of their setting? Could we dispute their Hibernian origin had Macpherson called himself O'Flaherty and hailed from Dublin? We are almost tempted to ask, could we have tracked him back to Caledonia had he disguised the names of his heroes and hills in Choctaw and had his poems been published posthumously at the charges of the Smithsonian Institute? What are the native qualities in such representative passages as the following?

> "And fallest thou, son of my fame! And shall I never see thee, Oscar! When others hear of their sons, I shall not hear of thee. The moss is on thy four grey stones; the mournful wind is there. The battle shall be fought without him: he shall not pursue the dark-brown hinds. When the warrior returns from battles, and tells of other lands; I have seen a tomb, he will say, by the roaring stream, the dark dwelling of a chief. He fell by car-borne Oscar, the first of mortal men.—I, perhaps, shall

[1] Gray, *Works*, ed. Gosse, iii. 148.

hear his voice; and a beam of joy will rise in my soul." [1]

"Stranger of tales, said Toscar, hast thou marked the warrior's course? He must fall,—give thou that bossy shield!—In wrath he took the shield. Fair behind it rose the breasts of a maid, white as the bosom of a swan, trembling on swift-rolling waves. It was Colna-dona of harps, the daughter of the king. —Her blue eyes had rolled on Toscar, and her love arose." [2]

It is easy to see why Europe found this unreality so real. The infinite melancholy of the Ossianic books, their sentiment and lyrical appeal, their Biblical sublimity of expression,[3] were welcomed by writers, not so much as a revelation, as the first adequate satisfaction of a general yearning. The stranger Macpherson, bent on a Chattertonian frolic, had stumbled in their way. He seemed to give them what their passion for mystery and gloom and their eighteenth century ennui demanded, an excuse, a place, a setting, for the freer exercise of imagination. Who, in these days, had written, as in these contrasted passages noted by Blair? "Thus they passed the night in song, and brought

[1] *Temora, u.s.* p. 16.

[2] *Colna-dona*, in the same volume, p. 223.

[3] On this, as well as on the ousting of Homer, the reader may be reminded of Voltaire's quizzical fiction, in the article on the Ancients and Moderns in the *Encyclopédie*, of a lively meeting at Lord Chesterfield's house of a Florentine, an Oxford Professor, and a Scot, where the opening lines of *Fingal, beuglés* by the last, are the challenge to encounter.

back the morning with joy. Fingal arose on the heath, and shook his glittering spear in his hand. He moved first towards the plains of Lena, and we followed like a ridge of fire. Spread the sail, said the King of Morven, and catch the winds that pour from Lena. We rose on the wave with songs, and rushed with joy through the foam of the ocean."[1] And this: "Thou art fairer than the ghost of the hills; when it moves in a sunbeam at noon over the silence of Morven."[2] And this: "The hunter shall hear from his booth. He shall fear, but love my voice. For sweet shall my voice be for my friends; for pleasant were they both to me."[3] Macpherson gave them, as Goethe has pointed out, "ein vollkommen passendes Local"[4] for this exercise, by taking them to far-away Thule with its *mise-en-scène* of heath, moss-grown grave-stones, wind-tossed grass, and lowering sky.[5] Young France and Germany had been dreaming of adventure in the cloudscapes of a spiritual twilight. In *Fingal* and *Temora* came the answer to the longing. Amid the imaginary mists of an imaginary Caledonia Macpherson's heroes fought and loved and lamented as a Chateaubriand, a

[1] *Fingal*, p. 84. Blair, *Dissert.*, p. 28.

[2] *Fingal*, p. 14. Blair, *ib.*, p. 38.

[3] *The Songs of Selma*, *ib.* p. 212. Blair, *ib.*, p. 38.

[4] The phrase was respectable in Goethe's day, without any beerhouse suggestion, as in modern Germany.

[5] See *Wahrheit und Dichtung*, iii. (xiii.).

Goethe, or a Lamartine craved. To each, as to the last,

> " La harpe de Morven de mon âme est l'emblème ;
> Elle entend de Cromla les pas de morts venir ;
> Sa corde à mon chevet résonne d'elle-même
> Quand passe sur ses nerfs l'ombre de l'avenir." [1]

Here was Macpherson's triumph, and with it the beginning of Scotland's literary reputation throughout Europe. It mattered not that the general impression was confused, or the gratitude extravagant, or the universality of appeal overstated, when a French poet could identify his own mountains by the details of the Northern picture, and his own passion on the lips of Ossianic lovers.[2] This welcome made the way easier to others whose task was to show the realities. Indeed, it may be doubted whether the truer Scottish temper of the *Border Minstrelsy* and *Waverley* would have been so readily accepted had not Macpherson's pretty fiction put the world in such good humour with its 'Caledonians.'

To these two influences—of Nature and the Heroic—Scotland added a third in the Romantic Ballad. Not only has she contributed far in excess of what might be expected of her literary opportunity, as her share of the ten-quarto *corpus* [3]

[1] *Les Confidences*, VI. xi. (vol. xxix. ed. 1863).
[2] *ib.*, VI. vi. [3] Ed. Child.

shows, but she has taken a critical and editorial interest in the genre, which is unrivalled.

Here the Scot's antiquarian habit served him to better purpose. There is nothing in the South to stand beside the general treasuries which John Asloan, George Bannatyne, and Sir Richard Maitland gathered in the sixteenth century, though there had always been many in England, as elsewhere, who from Tottel's day indulged the 'Miscellany' habit, or who, like Pepys and Lord Dorset, were merely curious and acquisitive. When Addison, in 1711, invited the readers of the *Spectator* to turn to *Chevy Chase* for fresh enjoyment, Scotland had already shown her interest in a practical way. For though the three volumes of Watson's *Choice Collection*[1] were concerned with "comic and serious Scots poems, both Ancient and Modern," rather than with romantic pieces of the ballad type, and with their appeal to the general reader rather than to literary persons, they were not without indications of revolt against the classical taste of the age, and they were immediately provocative of more vigorous protests. Imitation showed the sincerity of the liking for the older romantic stuff, when, in 1719, *Hardyknute* appeared as an original, recovered by a Scottish dame, Lady Wardlaw—the beginning of a long tale of delicate faking and mystification which does

[1] Vol. i., 1706; ii., 1709; iii., 1711.

not end with the forgivable fun of Sir Walter. It perhaps helps us to think less of Macpherson's impudence and more generously of the tragedy of his literary close,[1] when we see how youthful Romanticism in all its kinds was so shy or so tricksy in confession. In 1719, the year after the authorized appearance of Prior's rendering of the *Nut Brown Maid* in his *Henry and Emma*, and the year of the first instalment of D'Urfey's cathartic collection (with some Scottish contributions)—perhaps England's only work in this kind—Ramsay produced his *Scots Songs*, and, between 1724 and 1727, the three volumes of his *Tea-Table Miscellany*, containing a number of ballads, and the two volumes of his *Ever Green*. Scotland owes much to her poetical wigmaker; partly for his *Gentle Shepherd*, which, if we would be generous, anticipated the *Seasons* in its love of Nature, and which, for patriotic and local reasons, enjoyed greater popularity, in spite of its artificiality; but chiefly for his editorial labours in the *Miscellany* and *Ever Green*. In these he accomplished a double purpose. He linked the truer Scottish sentiment of his day with the past, explained, though with poor scholarly equipment, the literary continuity, and made it possible, or at

[1] In the impossible task of reconstituting the original texts, in courtesy to his supporters, which he persistently shirked and left to be attempted after his death.

least easier, for his greater successors, Fergusson and Burns, to do what they did. In the second place, he entered a general plea for a break with contemporary fashion, not because the older stuff was old but because it was simple. In the Preface to the *Miscellany* he quotes some doggerel commendation by his friend Bannerman in America—

> "Nor only do your lays o'er Britain flow,
> Round all the globe your happy sonnets go;
> Here thy soft verse, made to a Scottish air,
> Are often sung by our Virginian fair.
> Camilla's warbling notes are heard no more,
> But yield to 'Last time I came o'er the moor';
> Hydaspes and Rinaldo both give way
> To Mary Scott, Tweedside, and Mary Gray."

Ramsay's taste was poor, but he proved himself better able than more scholarly or dandified versifiers to lead the public to fresh enjoyment of the simple motives of song and ballad. In his homely way he did as much as Percy in discrediting the 'imported' and 'embroidered' style. He was seconded by William Thomson,[1] in his *Orpheus Caledonius* (1725), which gave musical aid in popularizing the new-old matter, and helped Burns and his successors in their task of reconstruction.

Though nothing of importance appeared in England or Scotland till after the mid-century,

[1] In the Romantic Revival, Scotland owes something to three of the name of Thomson: to James, of the *Seasons*, William, here alluded to, and George, who set so much of Burns. And Thomas, the antiquary, may be kept in mind.

Cantilenus, as Johnson unsympathetically reminds us, still "turned all his thoughts upon old ballads, for he considered them as the genuine records of the national taste." [1] The lull was broken by Thomas Percy, when, after preliminary meddlings with the verse of mandarins and skalds, he "turned his thoughts" to the famous Folio, and, encouraged by Shenstone, produced the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. What this great book did for struggling Romanticism in England is a commonplace. On that it is enough to say at this point, that its effect was as immediate as that of the Ossianic poems, and more lasting. Its influence on Scotland was remarkable. It was a spark to the old tinder. And yet this metaphor is not altogether happy, for the public has forgotten one fact, which we might as truly figure forth as the firing of some good English tinder by a Scottish spark. It is supplied by Percy himself in his preface, where in the forefront of his acknowledgements to literary friends he says: "To Sir David Dalrymple, Bart., of Hailes, near Edinburgh, the editor is indebted for most of the beautiful Scottish poems with which this little miscellany is enriched, and for many curious and elegant remarks with which they are illustrated. Some obliging communications of the same kind were received from John MacGowan, Esq., of Edinburgh; and many

[1] *The Rambler*, No. 177

curious explanations of Scottish words in the glossaries from John Davidson, Esq., of Edinburgh, and from the Rev. Mr. Hutchinson, of Kimbolton." This was not mere English courtesy, and Scotland was not slow in taking the hint that she had much material, rich and unexplored. The success of the *Reliques* was an immediate encouragement, and Scottish collections by Scottish editors poured from the press. Indeed, few of Percy's many followers dealt with anything but Scottish ballads. When the bishop died in 1811, a goodly library of these books had already appeared. The mere names and titles are cumulative evidence of some importance: David Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scots Songs, Heroic Ballads, etc.* (1769), Pinkerton's *Scottish Tragic Ballads* (1781) and *Select Scotish Ballads* (1783), James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (1787), with which Burns associated himself, Dalyell's *Scotish Poems of the Sixteenth Century*, with its selection from the *Gude and Godlie Ballatis* (1801), Sir Walter Scott's great book *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-1803), Robert Jamieson's *Popular Ballads and Songs* (1806), John Finlay's *Historical and Romantic Ballads* (1808), together with the English contributions of Thomas Evans (1777) and the indefatigable Ritson. And what of the later series—even if we do not go beyond 1840, when posthumous honours were paid to the

editor of the *Reliques* by the foundation of the Percy Society—piled up by the labour of the antiquary Laing, Buchan, Allan Cunningham, Kinloch, Motherwell, Maidment, Chambers, Peter Cunningham, and others? This bibliography is too full and continuous to be explained as a mere access of energy on the part of Dr. Dryasdust, too symptomatic of a powerful change in literary taste. With Burns and Scott involved, it could not be a mere fashion, amusing itself at the expense of the town exquisites. We, at the remove of a century, do not mistake its meaning—what its passion, and movement, and simplicity, and freedom brought to the making of the second Great Age of English Literature, and bequeathed to us to-day.

In direction and effect this ballad activity of Percy and his Scottish abettors differed from the Ossianic fervour; but each helped the other in the process towards Romanticism. The accepted authenticity of the Ballad gave it greater influence. It was less at the mercy of individual whim. It disclosed the wonder-house of the Middle Ages, which the heroic style of *Fingal*, with all its claims of ancientry, could not accomplish. It carried to the modern heart and eye the passion and colour of a living past. It possessed an infinite variety which no editorial overdoing could stale: to counter which Macpherson could

offer nothing but the solemnity of one mood. The harp of Morven had only one string; and Literature, tiring ere long of these monotones, as she tired of all the single-stringed melodies of the sentimentalists, turned to the Middle Ages, which she had miscalled ascetic and dull, and to the Ballads to satisfy her longing. Though both the Ballad hero and the Ossianic hero endured grievous insult at the hands of painful copyists, all the foolish 'Imitations' and all the cynicism of Fleet Street could not kill the Ballad motive, as the discrediting of Macpherson shattered the Fingalian [1]: for the one was an incentive, the other a mere easement; the one continued as an active influence, the other, as all things sentimental in origin and mode, was a victim of its self-destructive habit. Of the process of that influence nothing need be said now, and no one requires to be reminded of what Wordsworth told his generation about its effect on Bürger and others, and about its redemptive power in English poetry.[2] Everybody knows, too, that the foreign compliment was returned, when Scott began his career with homage to Bürger.[3] The repayment was all the more handsome, coming from the homeland of Ballad,

[1] "Ossian semblait l'égal d'Homère," says M. Anatole France, "quand on le croyait ancien. On le méprise depuis qu'on sait que c'est MacPherson" (*Le Jardin d'Épicure*, p. 224).

[2] *Essay Supplementary to the Preface.*

[3] *The Chase* and *William and Helen*, 1796.

where the material was so rich and appreciation so strong. When the historian reflects on what the knowledge and sympathetic use of this material did for the world's literature, he is not likely to forget what aid Scotland gave, in different ways, in leading that literature back to the fountains of Romance.

CHAPTER VII

THE NORTHERN AUGUSTANS

The old capital of Scotland attracts the stranger as few cities do, even those of greater historic pretence. Curiosity or piety may bring him to the places which Mary Stuart knew or where the ghosts of the good folk of the Waverley Novels still walk, but the first joy of acquaintance is something more than what comes from the direct touch of a great past. It is the pleasure of surprise—the revelation of a scene, striking because of its happy understanding between Man and Nature, but more striking because it is unexpected. "How was this done by a country so poor?" once remarked a New Englander, on beholding the panorama of the Old Town from the gardens by the Scott Monument. He had come, as so many do, with prejudices about the land of the Thistle, and with Scriptural memories of what man may not expect to gather from that unfriendly plant. Even the Scot is tempted to ask himself, how, with all his 'penury,' he has been able to plan and rear this

metropolis, and why, with all his 'penuriousness,' as averred by southern wits, and all his utilitarianism, as asserted by other 'authorities,' he has so engaged himself, when, if he had known his proper business, he should have been growing oats and curing haddocks. It was no narrow patriotism which stirred Scott to praise of this 'darling seat,' or made the critical Lockhart forget himself in the honest compliments of his Peter Morris. There is something in its atmosphere, blow as the east wind will, something in its tumbled sky-line from the old Castle to St. Giles, something in the dignity of its institutions and the ease of its people which gives Edinburgh an individual and arresting interest to all comers, which at the same time proclaims it neither a show-city nor a commercial Philistia, but a place that would offer welcome to the Muses, in whatever mood these wandering ladies chose to come. Nowadays the Scot has almost forgotten that there was once a northern capital of letters, rivalling and even excelling London. He takes it for granted that talent must find its way to the South, and, willing that others should write the books, is satisfied with the task of seeing that he has the printing of them. He may console himself with the platitudes about opportunity and convenience, and convince himself of the uselessness of protest when all northern literary purpose and manners have grown so

English. Yet, when he tests this view in the light of history, he will find that it was just when the affectation of southern modes was strongest that the Scottish capital most indulged its self-confidence and enjoyed its power. Before the eighteenth century there was never a literary Edinburgh in any reasonable sense of the term; but in that century, when so many went south, and those that remained seemed to dream that they were there too, Scotland became conscious of her particular literary place and of a capacity to influence others. England did not grudge to acknowledge this, and she made amends for her complaint against a Scot-haunted London by sending her sons to the Scots' own city.

Few places have been better served than Edinburgh by the gossip and literary annalist. The fulness of the record of its period of power is a confession of self-consciousness. There is the series of Memoirs and Letters of all the eminent and 'ingenious' persons, of Hume and Scott and Jeffrey, of Reid and Robertson and Dugald Stewart, of their patrons and printers, so confidential and particular that we seem to know these worthies as well as they knew each other. There is the entertaining prattle of visitors like that of the Englishman Edward Topham, who, "in remembrance of many civilities received," presented the inhabitants with friendly reflections on their

character;[1] and of the inconsequent, but ever-amusing De Latocnaye, a French *emigré*,[2] and his more ponderous countryman Simond.[3] There are the reminiscences of 'Jupiter' Carlyle, the correspondence of Kirkpatrick Sharpe (the 'Scottish Horace Walpole'), the Tytlers, Anna Seward, and their friends, and the appreciations of such as William Smellie[4] and Ramsay of Ochtertyre. But above all, there are Lockhart, for descriptive criticism in his *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, and John Kay, for pictorial aid in his *Original Portraits and Caricature Etchings*. In 1816 Scott had published his *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, an account of his journey to Paris after a visit to Waterloo. His young friend, later his son-in-law and biographer, was happily inspired when he played Peter to his senior's Paul, and chose their 'romantic town' for his subject. The imaginary Peter Morris, M.D., of Pensharpe Hall, made good use of his time from the moment he drove into the city in his shandrydan. "I arrived," he says, "without prejudices against that which I should see and was ready to open myself to such impressions as might come." He began well by taking

[1] *Letters from Edinburgh*, 1776.

[2] *Promenade autour de la Grande Bretagne*, Edinburgh, 1795, and *Promenade d'un Français dans l'Irlande*, Dublin, 1797 (containing some Scottish matter).

[3] *Journal of a Tour*, 1810-1811. Edin. 1815.

[4] *Literary and Characteristical Lives of J. Gregory, M.D., Lord Kames, David Hume, and Adam Smith.* Edin. 1800 (*posthum.*).

a general view of the city from the Calton Hill, from which he "descended again into her streets in a sort of stupor of admiration." He went everywhere and saw everybody, and, blessed with his creator's keen eye and critical talent, has drawn a remarkable picture of Edinburgh society and its literary lions, of Wilson, Jeffrey, Scott, Henry Mackenzie, Hogg, Dr. Chalmers, Raeburn ("his works would do honour to any capital of Europe,"[1] he says prophetically) and many others. He has given memories of Hume, Burns, and Braxfield (Stevenson's 'Weir of Hermiston'), gossip of the Edinburgh Reviewers and of the beginnings of *Blackwood*—everything in fact that the historian, critic, impressionist, even the producer of 'costume' plays could desire.[2] For pictorial supplement there is the collection of over seven hundred plates by the miniaturist Kay, a series unrivalled by any other city, and, despite the crudeness which may be permitted to caricature, a fair presentment of everybody then interesting to his neighbours;[3] and, a generation later, Benjamin Crombie's portraits of *Modern Athenians*,[4] lacking

[1] ii. 293.

[2] Some day we may be able to supplement this entertainment from the pages of an *Account of Contemporaries* ("not to be published while any of them are alive"), by John Leyden, the poet. (See the *Scotsman*, 26th April, 1890.)

[3] Offering in several cases the only portraits we possess. Burns is not included.

[4] 1839 to 1847.

the gusto of his predecessor's work, as well as its range of interest, though the artist had for subjects 'Christopher North,' Jeffrey, Edmondstoune Aytoun, and 'The Author of Waverley.'

This generous contemporary evidence is eked out by the records of a long series of Edinburgh clubs and societies. Though convivial opportunity was their frank purpose, they were the means of provoking considerable literary activity. The Scot's liking for this corporate pleasure was older than the eighteenth century, but it was then that he really discovered how clubbable he was. Many of these clubs, it must be confessed, were entirely bacchanalian, and not seldom disreputable or foolish, in grades of extravagance from the Pious, the Dirty, the Ugly, the Cape, or the Crochallan Fencibles (where in a rough wit-combat Burns admitted "that he had never been so abominably thrashed in his life")[1] to the wilder Boar and Hell-Fire; others claimed to be of a more pedantic and 'improving' kind, like the Rankenian,[2] where the young Colin Maclaurin and his friends cultivated, rather priggishly, "liberality of sentiment, accuracy of reasoning, correctness of taste, and attention to composition,"[3] or like the Speculative of Edinburgh University; others,

[1] *Traditions of Edinburgh*, p. 182.
[2] From 1717.
[3] Ramsay of Ochtertyre, i. 8 *n*.

again, where good talk and punch met on honourable terms, are represented by the Poker at Fortune's Tavern, the Select Society, the Friday Club; and there were the parties at Dugald Stewart's house, the gatherings of the 'Brotherhood of the Mountain' in the Cranstoun drawing-room,[1] and, later, the gossiping in Ebony's Saloon. If the rollicking 'Nights' at Ambrose's are after all but a fiction devised in the country calm of Chiefswood,[2] the fiction is good commentary on the compelling habit of the period.

There is therefore no lack of material of the personal and spectacular kind at the will of the historian who would reconstitute this literary society. The crowding of detail does not embarrass us; the area is clearly defined and compact, and everything falls easily into its place. "Here stand I," said a London visitor to printer Smellie, "at what is called the Cross of Edinburgh, and can in a few minutes take fifty men of genius by the hand."[3] "Edinburgh," says Matthew Bramble in *Humphrey Clinker*, "is a hotbed of genius." Let us hope that some day we shall have a comprehensive account of this crowded talent. We have had studies of individuals and coteries, not of the whole, with perhaps a little too much of

[1] Of Lord Corehouse and his sister.

[2] Oliphant, *William Blackwood and his Sons*, i. 261.

[3] Kerr, *Memoirs of William Smellie*, 1811, ii. 252.

that antiquarian fussiness which afflicts the Scot in tasks of this kind.

In writing of the literary purpose of this time, it is convenient to treat the latter half of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth as a whole, though it is more accurate to sort out two periods of particular brilliance and influence, the first between the years 1760 and 1770, when the turmoil of the 'Forty-Five had been almost forgotten, and the second between the French Revolution and the years immediately succeeding Waterloo. In the first it is the Edinburgh of David Hume; in the second of Walter Scott. In these two short stretches and round these two famous names is gathered all that is best and most enduring in later Scotticism.

The historian of these literary activities finds an easy approach through the membership of the more representative clubs, say, for the first period, the Select Society as it was in 1759, and as recorded by Alexander Carlyle, one of the company,[1] or the Poker, from its foundation in 1762,[2] and, for the second, the Friday Club of 1803, or some of the coteries of which we hear in *Peter's Letters*.

The fifteen members of the Select Society, whom

[1] Dugald Stewart, *Life and Writings of William Robertson*, 2nd edition, 1802, p. 214.

[2] Many of the Select Society were members. See the list in the Supplement to Tytler's *Life of Kames*; also A. Carlyle, *Autobiography*, new ed., pp. 439-444.

Allan Ramsay, the son of the poet,[1] drew together in 1754 for purposes of "philosophical inquiry and the improvement of members in the art of speaking," had, by 1759, increased their number to over one hundred and thirty, without serious offence to the claim of their titular epithet. For though the extension of membership brought with it a finer subdivision into grades of literary ability, and allowed the fellowship of sundry sympathetic nobles and gentry who were 'select' in another sense, the Society remained representative of all that was best in Scottish culture. There was perhaps a lack of poets, for London at that very time had peculiar attractions for the lovers of the lighter Muses; but literature had her sponsors in John Home, who had made a stir with his tragedy of *Douglas*, not so much by its merits as by his outrage of clerical propriety, in 'Jupiter' Carlyle ('the grandest demi-god I ever saw,' said Scott), and in Hugh Blair, the academic exponent of Augustan taste and the encourager of James Macpherson. For history there were William Robertson, by Gibbon's allowance a 'master artist,' Tytler, the defender of Mary, Queen of Scots, and Adam Ferguson, philosopher. There were representatives of that long line of Scottish lawyers who have made important contributions to litera-

[1] Who was the guiding spirit of the earlier, and less 'select,' Easy Club.

ture and science: James Burnett, later Lord Monboddo, who perplexed society with his Darwinian and Neo-Kantian anticipations; Sir David Dalrymple, afterwards Lord Hailes, Percy's coadjutor in the *Reliques* and the pious recoverer of older Scottish poetry; Henry Home, *alias* Lord Kames, author of the 'pretty essay'[1] on the *Elements of Criticism*; and Alexander Boswell (Lord Auchinleck), father of Bozzy and entertainer of the Great Cham, whom he dared to call an "auld dominie" who kept a school "and cau'd it an acaadamy."[2] For medicine, there were Monro, the first of the famous family of anatomists, and William Cullen; and for art, Allan Ramsay himself, and John and James Adam, two of those renowned Adelphians who brought a new dispensation to English architecture. Lastly, there were two, whom it is sufficient to name in 'Jupiter's' bald style, Adam Smith, "Professor of Ethics at Glasgow," and David Hume—unless we add the significant statement of Dugald Stewart that, though there was much excellent speaking in the Society, these select personages "never opened their lips."[3]

In the second period, which is longer and more brilliant, it is not so easy to find all the talent gathered at one board, as in the case of the Select Society; but all are clubmen, and in touch with

[1] Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, i. 394. [2] *Ib.*, v. 382.
[3] Dugald Stewart, *u.s.*, 1802, p. 213.

each other in one way or another. If philosophy and history were the chief concern of the older *literati*, though by no means in the pedantic way in which we might expect the thinkers and researchers of our day to regulate their symposia, if they took delight in such things, it was in literature and art that the later generation found its convivial excuse. Yet, philosophy was again the means, though indirectly, of creating the atmosphere and making the northern city a sort of intellectual spa. For Dugald Stewart, the last of the 'Scottish School,' a man of the most enticing personality and so attractive as a speaker that "there was eloquence in his very spitting,"[1] was then in his power. He drew to his University class-room not only the best of the Edinburgh youth, but many Englishmen who were frustrated by the Great War of their regulation continental tour. When Sydney Smith was denied Weimar, he came with his pupil to hear Stewart. The young Henry John Temple, the future Pam of European politics, spent some early years in Stewart's house, and laid (as in his own words) "the foundation of whatever useful knowledge and habits of mind I possess"; and Lord John Russell, destined, too, to be Prime Minister of Great Britain, attended his lectures. Older men less willing to renew the discipline of hard benches, or Tories chary of Stewart's sympathetic

[1] Cockburn, *Memorials*, pp. 22 *et seq.*

Liberalism, preferred his evening parties. Scott, who had no common ground in politics, liked to recall College days under one "whose striking and impressive eloquence riveted the attention of even the most volatile student,"[1] and he maintained "an affectionate intercourse" with him to the end.[2] Some decades earlier, when philosophy was, to quote Cockburn,[3] more "indigenous in the place," and "all classes, even in their gayest hours, were proud of the presence of its cultivators," Stewart might have diverted these budding statesmen and *littérateurs* to professional discipleship of Thomas Reid. But the times were changing. Stewart's personality brought the crowd, but the crowd brought its own likings. And these likings, whetted by the fellowship for which the elegant philosopher had given the opportunity, were developed in their own natural way. Nor was it ever in doubt that it was the personality of the man and not the academic *rechauffé* by the suspected philosopher that gave Stewart his hold on this society, nor matter of surprise that when his direct influence came to an end the vogue of philosophy abated.

Some of the wits of this later Edinburgh may be named in rough parallel with those of the earlier, and in illustration of the difference between

[1] Lockhart, *Life*, i. 59.
[2] *Ib.*, i. 235-236.
[3] *Life of Jeffrey*, i. 159.

the two periods. Philosophy gives Thomas Brown with Stewart, the last stalwarts of the 'Scottish School.' Science, mathematical and physical, has not a few respectable persons; and the Faculty of Medicine, then, and for a long time, the honour of the city, is well represented by, among others, James Gregory, whose reputation is, in the most literal sense, still in the mouths of the great public. For Art there are at least four whose names remain with us: David Wilkie, 'Circassian' Allan, Alexander Nasmyth, and Henry Raeburn, who, having been called 'a Scottish Reynolds' and praised and priced as a mere northern celebrity, has now a place among the masters in the galleries of Europe. The hegemony, however, was with literature. And what doubt could there be of this, with Burns and Scott of the company, and even if there had been no others? Though it will be admitted by many a modern reader that it is in the fame of these two, and in it alone, that he has found the excuse for acquaintance with Scottish literature, or by some that honour done to them is honour enough for Scottish genius, or any other, it must be kept in mind that Burns and Scott are by no means the sum of their age, or the whole measure of the influence of that age. Here some of the minors may be named, less out of civility to Scottish pride than because they deserve well of later generations for the part they played

in the establishment of new literary methods. The two chief centres of activity were the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, the one the critical reserve of Jeffrey and Sydney Smith and their Whig familiars, the other the exercise-ground for the more literary wit of Lockhart, Wilson, and Hogg. There is Henry Mackenzie, the last high priest of *sensibility*, hugging the memories of his *Mirror* and *Lounger* in these times of change.[1] There are John Leyden, poet, physician, and antiquary, who contributed the "Elf-King" to Gregory Lewis's *Tales of Wonder* and helped Scott with his *Border Minstrelsy*; Thomas Campbell, of *The Pleasures of Hope*, whom we prefer to remember for his war-lyrics; and, if Aberdeen and London will allow Edinburgh some claim, James Beattie, who busied himself so with Edinburgh's heretical David, and was one of the writers of the *Mirror*. For criticism in its philosophical mood, and in contrast with the workaday manner of the Reviewers, there is Alison, the academic exponent of the laws of Taste; and with him, if Aberdeen will again allow, George Campbell, surpassing Blair in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, and Alexander Gerard, the inspirer of Alison in his *Essay on Taste* (1759) and author of an *Essay on Genius* (1774). We cannot name the rankers in

1 "Old Mackenzie . . . I must say his day has gone by." Lockhart, in Oliphant, *Blackwood and his Sons*, i. 187.

this array of talent, beyond selecting Francis Horner and Hector MacNeill, the antiquaries George Chalmers, J. Graham Dalyell, and John Pinkerton, and, among other 'respectable persons,' Macvey Napier, Kirkpatrick Sharpe, Sir J. Mackintosh, and Sir Thomas Dick Lauder ; or speak of the sutlers, the ever necessary 'booksellers,' *hodie* publishers, beyond making passing mention of Archibald Constable, William Blackwood, and Robert Chambers, whose insight and enterprise transformed the whole business of authorship and established that Scottish tradition which John Murray and the Macmillans continued in England.

We have spoken of the part which Scotland played, unconsciously rather than of set purpose, in the movement towards Romanticism. The guest-city of Burns and the home of Scott could not forget that it had given welcome to the prophets.[1] Yet, notwithstanding a certain sympathy with the New Spirit, it could not abandon its past, because of the close-knit tradition of a small metropolis, and because that tradition concerned itself with things which demand a cast of mind more classical than romantic. The preoccupation with philosophy in all its familiar branches, metaphysics, ethics, logic, or in the newer kind formulated by Adam Smith ; with history, either in its antiquarian guise (ever the most popular in Scot-

[1] *Supra*, chapter vi.

land) or in the more literary but very ceremonious manner of Hume or Smollett, and especially of Robertson; with science as Monboddo and college professors interpreted it; with criticism and the theory of style as expounded by Blair and Alison, or used as a practical engine by the Reviewers for the reduction of Lake Schools and Cockney Poets to the terms of Common Sense; with verse-making for an intellectual public which liked morality and argument in couplets and its fun in epigram—all this seems to be poles apart from the spirit of the ballads which these elegant persons were now collecting, from Englishmen's Rimes of Ancient Mariners and Scots' Tam o' Shanters and Lords of the Isles. Even the Wizard was bound by a tradition from which his art freed others. "He had often said to me," says Ballantyne, "that neither his own nor any modern popular style of composition was that from which he derived most pleasure. . . . He had more pleasure in reading *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* than any other poetical composition he could mention; and I think I never saw his countenance more indicative of high admiration than while reciting aloud from those productions."[1] This is significant, much more significant than Byron's liking of Pope, for Byron was merely telling himself, what everybody knew, that to be

[1] Lockhart, *Life*, iii. 269.

even with dunces and 'Scotch Reviewers' one must use the master's unsurpassed weapon. It was the acknowledgement of the perfection of a certain instrument for a certain task. Scott's admission, however, means more. There is no compulsion, no question of special use; nor is he complimentary out of private regard for the author of *Vanity of Human Wishes*. His work has that background of eighteenth century *decorum* which makes us sometimes wonder whether he too, like Thomson and Macpherson, was conscious of the new trend in literature and of the direction of his own pioneer work. When we picture to ourselves the meeting of Burns and the fifteen-year-old Scott in 1786-7 in the house of the 'venerable' Adam Ferguson,[1] where, as Scott tells us, "there were several gentlemen of literary reputation, among whom I remember the celebrated Mr. Dugald Stewart," we feel that the setting, even for the chance encounter of this man and this boy, disappoints our critical expectations. A severely handsome drawing-room, the courtesies of a crowd of *philosophes* and their ladies, Burns, robust and simple, "the *douce gudeman* who held his own plough," Langhorne's poor lines and Bunbury's poorer print—these do not 'compose' well in any painting or narrative, however free and unhistorical the treatment may be; and a canvas which,

[1] Lockhart, i. 185.

some thirty years ago, tried to convey the scene, only showed how inappropriate and unsatisfying historical 'accuracy' may be. Nor is a lesson of contrast to be drawn, as if this meeting of the Ayrshire bard and the ballad-loving youth were to be taken as symbolic of the New thrown into relief against the Old. Yet no one is ill at ease, unless it be ourselves, who are so strangely uninformed about this dignified comfortable society.[1]

The academic spirit ruled in all things ; and its power was never shaken so rudely and suddenly as elsewhere. The reserve, the sense of form (mistaken for formality), the feeling for order, the sheer discipline of intellect, all stand out clearly, no matter in what 'cantrips' a very sober Muse might at times indulge. For these 'cantrips,' like the topsyturvydom of the older literature, whether the whimsical invasion of the real, or a countering of the pressure from that quarter, are but confession of the strength of the classical habit of mind. At this time, when other literatures were in a condition of flux, Scots clung to classical ideals. By its devotion to them it won much of its credit with posterity, and by their aid exerted no uncertain influence upon its neighbours. In appreciating what this later Scottish literature did for Romanticism, we forget how closely Romanticism was interwoven with classical tradition, and how much

[1] See Chapter viii.

of the texture and pattern of that tradition remained. We seem to be involved in a paradox, that a period of full passion and imaginative freedom is also a period responsive to the claims of classicism. Yet it is no paradox, for the greater ages, like the greater artists, always combine both qualities ; and the danger to the critic, in juggling with the pretty contrast of 'romantic' and 'classical,' is that he exalts the one and forgets the other.

If Scott and his friends were not fully in sympathy with the change afoot or indeed conscious of it, the public certainly had no delusions as to where its liking and faculty lay. Its mood was persistently critical. It was all for enquiry, for the testing of literary practice, and it took some pride in readjusting and interpreting the principles by which it judged the individual craftsman. In other words, these good people set themselves the task of erecting criticism to the dignity of a separate literary genre, and of winning for it respect and popularity. Down to this time Scotland had given but poor and scattered indications of any critical interest in the art of letters ; and England, on her part, notwithstanding the guiding talent of Dryden and Johnson—to name only the greatest—had not snatched the matter from the hands of the inexperienced, or supplied a code which was more than a jejune rehandling of Aris-

totle, Horace, and the Renaissance Italians. Nor had anything been done in a serious way to collect the materials required for the finding of a critical perspective, beyond what Capell had attempted in England within the narrow limits of his *Prolusions*, or Ramsay in Scotland, with no scholarly care, in his *Ever Green*: nor to arrange these materials in connected narrative, beyond what Warton, following the suggestion of Pope and Gray, but taking another method than theirs, had done in his *History of English Poetry*.[1] Nor had there been more than a hint of what we may call the mechanism or machinery of the critical workshop, the 'Review' and 'Magazine,' for the *Tatler* and *Spectator* and the crowd of imitators had gossiped too freely of "pictures, taste, and the musical glasses" to induce the public to take kindly to the systematic dulness of disquisitions like Addison's on *Paradise Lost*. Our familiarity with these things—we speak only of the change of outlook and the difference in the equipment offered, not of the merit or demerit in the use of opportunities—make us wonder that there had ever been a world so devoid of these necessaries of intellectual life. What share, we ask, had Scotland, and Edinburgh in particular, in the transformation?

There was, as has been said, something in the

[1] 1st vol. 1774; but not in complete form till 1824 (posthumously).

atmosphere which favoured the indulgence of this new mood. Philosophy, not always the best friend to the literary artist, exercised an influence; or rather, it was the training in philosophic method, the precision of the school of Common Sense, and the stimulus of David Hume which were provocative of enquiry outside the stricter matters of The Grove. This influence was not exerted in a magisterial way. The elegances and humanities of a society led by men like Ferguson and Stewart would have been wasted in professional task-work on Causation and Free-Will. Metaphysics did not move comfortably in silk knee-breeches, in handsome saloons, among vivacious women, and painters, and poetical lions from the wilds of Ayrshire. Disguised as Aesthetics, it was less of a bore to its neighbours and more at its ease. But only when, with something of the wisdom of Mr. Spectator, it adapted itself to the etiquette of 'assemblies' and 'tea-tables,' did it discover how popular it could be and what fresh opportunities were to be found. In some respects this condescension of the philosophers was their undoing. It served Thomas Brown badly, when he supersaturated his lectures with Akenside's blank verse. Yet the sacrifice was not without some reward. The disavowal, even in the class-room, of an exclusive concern in the Profundities did much to help the growth of taste in the crowd, already

attracted by the social charm and personal merit of its teachers. For these reasons the best of Scottish youth found college-life at Edinburgh entertaining; and for these reasons too, so many Englishmen and Irishmen were attracted. When they scattered, it was not as missioners of the cult of Thomas Reid or as trained partisans or opponents of the sceptical David. Some of the more serious sort, with the echoes of college-exercises in their ears, grew old in controversy about the 'Imitative Nature of Poetry' and vexed the booksellers with 'Letters' on the Standard of Taste; but others, and these perhaps the best, concluded that higher philanthropy (and the happiest moments for themselves) lay in settling and resettling the Ossianic question, in discovering Chaldee Manuscripts, and in making the public think about the Lake School and Cockney Poets. So that if it is true that the philosophical atmosphere favoured this literary development, it is also true that the product in time created an atmosphere of its own. Scotland, and Edinburgh in particular, won a place in the annals of literature with something of the credit of an inventor. What the novelty was and what influence it exerted both within Scotland and beyond are best explained by turning to the early years of the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine.*

The beginnings of the *Edinburgh Review*, founded in 1802, have a double historical interest,

on the one hand, in relation to earlier periodical enterprise and to Scotland's share in that, and, on the other, on account of certain characteristics of considerable prospective importance. The history of the 'Review,' as a distinct literary form in the sense familiar to us, opens in England with the establishment of the *Monthly Review* in 1749 and its rival the *Critical Review* in 1756. Before these we have nothing but a miscellany of 'Mercuries,' 'Newsletters,' 'Journals,' and the like, recording events for the curious. Boswell tells us that in 1767 Dr. Johnson, having been asked by King George whether "there were any other literary journals published in this kingdom except the *Monthly* and *Critical Reviews*," answered "there were no other"; and, in reply to a further question on their respective merits, said "that the *Monthly Review* was done with most care, the *Critical* on the best principles." [1] Johnson could then look back with mixed pleasure to his own experience in the *Rambler*,[2] Hawkesworth's *Adventurer*,[3] and the *Idler*,[4] all short-lived, for the most part one-man undertakings, and in type more akin to the *Spectator* than to the 'Reviews' which he was describing. His compliment to the *Critical*[5] stirs

[1] *Life of Johnson*, ed. Hill, ii. 39.

[2] 1750-1752. [3] 1752-1754. [4] 1758-1760.

[5] Which we need not narrow down to admiration of political and church 'principles,' though these are referred to later in the anecdote, and were doubtless important in Johnson's eyes.

northern pride, for that Review was the London venture of one Archibald Hamilton, an exile from Edinburgh on account of some connexion with the troubles which came to a head in the Porteous Riots, and the 'Society of Gentlemen' which supplied the literary material was controlled by another Scot, the novelist Smollett. The title 'Critical' is significant; so, too, the greater number of literary articles on such subjects as Gray's *Odes* and Home's *Douglas*. The general purpose, as disclosed in the editors' defensive preface to the first volume (1756), is in many ways a forecast of that of the *Edinburgh*. There is 'fight' in it (for the redoubtable Griffiths and his wife had to be dealt with)—protests that the undertakers will speak "without prejudice, fear, or affection," and promises that "neither prayers nor threats shall induce them to part with their integrity and independence."

After this Scottish proclamation on English soil, the scene changes to Scotland, and there, with the exception of some critical skirmishings of minor interest, the whole history of the 'Review' is enacted. As yet the *Scots Magazine and General Intelligencer*, founded in 1739 on the model of the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1731) and known from 1749 as the *Scots Magazine*, was a purely political and newsmongering journal. So it remained when a group of young men, Alexander Wedderburn,

afterwards Lord Chancellor of England, William Robertson, Blair, and Adam Smith launched their *Edinburgh Review*, with patriotic purpose and an amusing profession of critical sobriety,[1] to stir North Britain to greater literary confidence and more informed judgement of outside learning. But the new periodical burnt itself out in its second number, and it is remembered now only as a curious anticipation of the name and manner of the later *Edinburgh*, and as the encourager of the first efforts of Robertson and Adam Smith.[2] When Walter Ruddiman, probably inspired by Smollett's venture in the South, started his *Edinburgh Magazine* in July 1757, he politely excused the appearance of a new journal, "when this part of the kingdom was in possession of one[3] which had so long and deservedly enjoyed the public favour," by saying that "it will be allowed that the bounds of a monthly magazine, besides what it must necessarily contain, cannot comprehend every occasional essay, poem, etc. which deserves notice." Later in the century the rival *Scots*, after long enjoyment of public favour, became alive to the growing literary demands of the public which the astute Ruddiman

[1] As in the first number: "We are almost ashamed to say we have read this pamphlet. 'Tis such a low scurrilous libel, that even the most necessitous printer or publisher must be at a loss for finding a decent excuse for publishing it."

[2] Adam Smith wrote an article on Johnson's *Dictionary*.

[3] *The Scots Magazine*.

had recognized. In its 'new series,' begun in 1794, political gossip and argument yielded space to literary criticism; and in 1802, the year of Jeffrey's first thunderbolt, it became, in a further series, edited by the poet-physician Leyden, still more literary in character.[1]

Ruddiman's bantling expired in 1762 in a splutter of three columns of verse, describing the 'pregnant prospect' of the 'literary field' when it started, and lamenting its inability to cope with rivals, doubtless the vigorous *Monthly* and *Critical* which circulated with the *Scots* in Edinburgh circles.

> "To these we stooped not, till they bore along
> Our noblest friends of genius, taste, and song,
> Who, smit with love of novelty, withdrew,
> And joined the standards of an alien crew.
> 'Tis vain to struggle when our Friends rebell:
> When Brutus drew the poniard, Caesar fell."

But Caesar was yet to have his Mark Antony; till which time, there were not a few efforts made in support of a more literary journalism. Among these were the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review*, produced between 1773 and 1776 by a 'Society of Gentlemen,' directed by Dr. Gilbert Stuart and printer Smellie, and with Burns's Dr. Blacklock and Hume among the contributors. Stuart stated

[1] When it stopped in 1826, on the Constable failure, its copyright passed to its literary rival *Blackwood's Magazine*.

in his Preface that "there has not hitherto appeared in Scotland a periodical publication which has been conducted with liberal views and on extensive plan." The first number promised well, with a *pot-pourri* of anecdotes on Scottish literature, 'literary news' from England, a 'character' of Tacitus, an epitaph on Smollett, six columns of verse, a longer section of reviews of recent books, and a short concluding summary of news from the chief European centres; but Stuart showed such ferocity, especially in his onslaughts on Monboddo's *magnum opus*, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*,[1] that the publishers were compelled to intimate a cessation of hostilities 'for some months.'[2] In 1779-80, the 'Man of Feeling' made venture with his *Mirror*, *A Periodical Paper*, which ran to one hundred and ten numbers. It was literary in the older sense in which we think of the *Spectator*, and its avowed object "to hold the Mirror up to Nature" was so truly spectatorial that the 'Scottish Addison,' as Scott has styled Mackenzie, had the charge preferred against him that he was too literal a copyist

[1] See vol. v. pp. 88 *et seq.* The opening sentence of the first article on this book has the vitriol of a later generation of censurers: "The unsuccessful attempts of this author to acquire the estimation of the public seem to have affected both his temper and reasoning; and it is with pain we remark that, in the volume before us, his characteristic weaknesses are prominent and striking to a degree that must excite surprise and compassion."

[2] *ib.*, p. 392.

of the English model. It pursued its course with an old-fashioned amiability and elegance, and revenged itself on its critics by quizzing them in the approved Addisonian manner.[1] The *North British Magazine* of 1782, a rival of the *Scots*, was not a success, and James Sibbald's *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* (1785), also a rival of the *Scots*, was undistinguished, though it may be remembered as the first to draw attention to Burns, in a sympathetic review as early as October, 1786.[2] Thereafter literary journalism abated its ambition for a time, and fell to the level of Anderson's *Bee*, the dull *Edinburgh Herald*, which had the luck to secure *Tam o' Shanter*,[3] and gossipy repositories of public events like the *Historical Register* or the *Edinburgh Gazetteer* (1792). England was in no better plight, though the *Monthly* rumbled on, and Richard Cumberland revived Mackenzie's rôle for a time (1786-1791) in the *Observer*, the last of the Spectatorial journals. There was perhaps a symptom of coming change in the *Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner*, as in the first efforts of its contributors in the Etonian *Microcosm*, but the brilliant literary

[1] *Mirror*, No. 79.

[2] Mackenzie seconded this praise in December, in the ninety-seventh number of a new venture, *The Lounger*, in which he followed on the lines of the *Mirror*, but with inferior power and with less applause.

[3] This honour was shared with the *Edinburgh Magazine* in March 1791.

fun was shaped to political ends, and lost, till separate publication later, in the plain prose of party argument.

This "dotage of all the existing journals"[1] gave an opportunity to a band of young Edinburgh friends to found the *Edinburgh Review—secundus et major*. The effect, as Jeffrey's biographer has said, was "electrical."[2] "The old periodical opiates were extinguished at once. The learning of the new Journal, its talent, its spirit, its writing, its independence, were all new; and the surprise was increased by a work so full of public life springing up, suddenly, in a remote part of the kingdom." Neither the undertakers nor their public "could then discern its consequences."[3] The combination of politics and literature, or rather the pronounced political purpose of the *Review*, is not surprising. In these Napoleonic days it would have been hard to find even a limited number of readers entirely devoted to the Muses. From the first the Whig editor recognized that it was well to have what he called "two legs," but he had to learn that one must be the stronger, and experience had to tell him which. The young *Review* was, if not violent, at least energetic in the use of both limbs; but energy in politics, as then understood, soon threatened its stability, in a way

[1] Cockburn, *Life of Jeffrey*, i. 126.
[2] *Ib.* i. 131. [3] *Ib.*, p. 132.

which all the scolding of bards in hours of idleness was unable to do. Whiggism roused Toryism, and Jeffrey's Cevallos article called the *Quarterly* into being and alienated good literary friends like Scott. Jeffrey, while confessing that his "natural indolence would have been better pleased not to be always in sight of an alert and keen antagonist," rejoiced at "the prospect of this kind of literature, which seems to be more and more attended to than any other, being generally improved in quality," and was "proud to have set an example."[1] By this countering of each other in politics, the two journals and their increasing public were drawn more and more to interest themselves in other problems and to find new opportunity and fresh pleasure in the party feuds of Letters.

If we go to the *Edinburgh* and its rival in search of literary originality and brilliance, we shall be disappointed. Such plums are rare in its solid pudding. Contemporaries were not deluded in this; they felt that it was by the novelty, the shock of new methods, that the rivals won their way so easily. Later, when experience had fixed the habit, a higher literary competence might be expected to disclose itself in critical journalism. As philosophy had been the foster-mother at an earlier stage, so were politics then; and just as in that earlier stage literary talent disentangled itself

[1] *ib.* i. 193.

slowly from the mannerisms of the schools, so in the later it seemed unwilling or unable to forget its training in party debate. At both stages the quality of the literary critiques is generally poor and the misunderstanding often surprising, if not wanton ; yet in the united effort there was promise of better things.

This *Edinburgh* coterie had convinced itself from the first that the safety of letters lay in the frankness and boldness of the critic's handling. Neither respect for person or place nor tradition was to block him in his course and prevent his dealing faithfully with all persons whom he chose to think disorderly. The North had already some experience of the severity and effrontery of journalistic critics, and had seen more than one Review wear itself out quickly with its own hard hitting. It may be true, with some necessary qualifications,[1] that "the older rivals of the *Edinburgh* maintained for the most part a decent and amiable impartiality,"[2] but of Jeffrey and his friends there is never a doubt of their competence with the sturdiest of their predecessors in the business of dragooning. They appear to exercise themselves in it more persistently and more systematically, to be conscious of their aggressiveness, and to find no little sport in performing their self-imposed

[1] As shown *supra*.

[2] Saintsbury, *Essays in Eng. Lit., 1780-1800.* 1890, p. 108.

tasks. Their elders, on the other hand, convey the impression, even when they are in their ugliest moods, that they think they are only candid or paternal.

This boldness, though remarkable in the Edinburgh Reviewers and more remarkable in their more literary successors, is a minor contribution to the history of critical method compared with what they did towards defining the critic's function and elevating Criticism *per se* to a place among the literary genres. Here again, it would appear, their political training served them not so badly in the end; for if party encourages a man to explain politics in the terms of a working theory, the literary critic trained first in this school cannot well avoid bringing certain prepossessions to his new task, or, at least, being tempted to find some easy analogies in method. When imagination is active, and rather strangely and variously expressed, as happened among the poets at this very time, he is driven to discover, or rather recover, some working formula, if only to excuse his bludgeoning. It was easy in Pope's day to be amiable in commentary of Popian verse; if a rather indolent criticism disliked Mr. Dennis's writing, it was generally because the critics disliked Mr. Dennis. But it was different when Lake Schools and Cockney Poets, when Wordsworth and Shelley and Keats and other eccentrics crowded the scene.

The Constitution of Letters was in danger. Political Whiggery disguised as literary Toryism felt it its duty to fight for order, and in upholding that Constitution to explain it and to show how it was endangered. This militancy could not fail to provoke reprisals. The comedy of the situation was that the Reviewers, and Jeffrey in particular, had no claim to take up the line of defence which they did. They were moderns in spirit, if any were, disapproving of Scott's antiquarianism ; of Byron's sentimentality and *Weltschmerz*, because these things jarred upon men who were praying hard to be, above all things, happy ; of Wordsworth's nature-mysticism, because it dumfounded practical minds, and of his 'real language of real men,' the object of so much exaggerated and mistaken fun, because it was vulgar ; of De Quincey's flamboyant prose because it was—flamboyant ; generally, of the New Poetry, because of its extravagance and bustle. Thus, while moderns in spirit, though scarcely knowing it themselves, they were forced by the exigencies of the situation to revert, as critics often do or must, to a more classical creed than they might accept in calmer moments. These inconsistencies may be overlooked; in any case, they need not distract us in our historical perspective. All was for good, for as the 'new' poets had stirred the imagination of a public grown sleepy or dull, the reviewers were to stir its critical powers,

and, even by their mistakes, to lead themselves and that public to a livelier appreciation of literature and give a new dignity to their calling as guides.

In a third and more practical way they may claim the honour of being originators, in what may be called the economics of editing and authorship. They purged periodical literature of many of its Grub Street infamies, by instituting, with the aid of a princely-minded publisher, an honourable relationship between him and themselves, and, as a consequence, by relieving their craft from the incubus of the unpaid elegants. General competence rose when work was not extorted for a pittance or accepted without fee from ambitious fools. Further, there grew up, quite naturally, in these earlier warlike conditions, an editorial right of discipline and a call for uniformity in the work contributed. The Reviewers give us the first clear hint of what in more modern phrase we call the 'policy of a paper,' which, for good or ill, has remained the rule of journalistic enterprise. Here, yet again, we seem to find an effect of the old political association and the old party habit.

It is easy to see the risks of the critical method inaugurated by the *Edinburgh Review* and developed during the early rivalry of the *Quarterly*. Gifford shows us, rather provokingly, the defect of

Jeffrey's quality, and, more than any other contemporary, confuses the issue for us. He too well deserves his reputation for the indulgence of the canine pleasures of snarling and biting. He took the motto of the *Edinburgh*[1] for his rule, in a way which Jeffrey and his friends in the North never did, and he remains responsible for that misconception, still popular, which makes the critic a sort of Herod. Had it not been for Southey and Scott—the latter especially, who has there given us what is still his best prose and sanest opinion—the *Quarterly* might have succumbed to the fury of its first editor, 'so savage and tartarly.'

The lesson of the *Edinburgh* was not lost on a later band of Edinburgh adventurers, who, while fully recognizing the right to be sharp-tongued in censure, had too much of the true literary stuff in them to make journalism a mere 'scorpion'-business. *Blackwood's Magazine* survived the tempests of its first years—the actions-at-law, challenges to duels, and lampoons—and the coldness of superior friends. For much of this trouble *Maga* was itself to blame; but there was confidence, and good spirits, and enough of the 'humanities' to outlast 'the animosities.'[2] A right literary gust will save a situation when other graces fail.

[1] *Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur* (Publius Syrus).

[2] John Wilson's own word.

Blackwood, with Lockhart, 'Christopher North,' Hogg, and the Irishman Maginn, and the rival *London Magazine*, a birth of the same year (1817), with Hazlitt, Lamb, Hood, and De Quincey, offered entertainment which the generation of Jeffrey's and Gifford's prime had never enjoyed. If *Maga* cannot claim to have originated or imposed the new habit, or to be a very decorous Prospero, it may have the credit of giving the tormented Ariel of letters its freedom.

> "It was mine art,
> When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape
> The pine, and let thee out."

Yet it was a strange setting free—at least the manner of it. There had been nothing like *Maga's* first number: nothing since, quite like this olio of fun, wicked personalities, sober criticism, and good literary relish. The strangest thing of all to us, who are too far removed to appreciate how our great-grandfathers were convulsed, is that the nucleus of the excitement—the fiction of the *Chaldee MS.*—was a purely local matter, a riddle of Edinburgh allusion, a quizzing in Biblical English of two obscure persons Pringle and Cleghorn (the 'Two Beasts'), of Constable, the publisher ('Crafty'), of Scott ('The Magician'), who "almost choked with laughter" at his portrait, and of Lockhart himself, "the scorpion which

delighteth to sting the faces of men." There were other articles, one abusing Coleridge, and another, the first of a series by 'Z' on the 'Cockney School of Poets,' duly noted in London as a clever feat of gun-running in a long-drawn conflict; but these did not stir even the South as the 'Manuscript' did. The tradition of the older review was broken; henceforth the magazine would allow a wider reach to writers—place for original essays, 'occasional' pieces, fiction and verse, parody, what not, with, perhaps, as in the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, and *Blackwood* of to-day, a tailpiece on politics, as a sop to old Cerberus. The shock of this anarchism on the part of the Tory journal, considered apart from the shock which its effrontery and mercilessness caused to respectabilities like the 'Man of Feeling,' Fraser Tytler, and Dr. McCrie, may be measured by the protest of John Murray, then, though not for much longer, its London publisher. "The prominent features of the Magazine," he said, "should be literary and scientific news, and most of all the latter, for which your editors appear to have little estimation, and they seem not to be the least aware that this is ten times more interesting to the public than any other class of literature at present. . . . You have unfortunately too much of the Lake School, for which no interest is felt here. Give us foreign literature, particularly German, and let them create

news in all departments."[1] The incorrigible Lockhart lulled Murray's fears by presenting the observations of the Baron von Lauerwinkel and Professor Sauerteig—first sketches of Teufelsdröckh and the literary fantastics of the mid-century. Thus did one thing produce another; each difficulty brought fresh opportunity. If the sowing was at random, the harvest was good; how good, the London *Fraser* would soon show,[2] with Lockhart, Maginn, and Hogg, and with these (as if to make all editors envious) Coleridge, Southey, Carlyle, Galt, Theodore Hook, Harrison Ainsworth, and Thackeray. *Fraser* has gone, but others have come; and though Edinburgh still has its *Blackwood*, vigorous as ever, but less 'local' in interest than in the days of the Old Saloon, the true product of the pioneer work lies outside. Edinburgh cannot now, if it would, oust London. In these matters literature cannot defy economics. Leigh Hunt's taunt that the Scot of his day "swears (of course) by the *Edinburgh Review*, and thinks *Blackwood* not easily put down"[3] has lost its point in our more cosmopolitan generation. History, however, is a kindly interpreter of northern pride; and somehow there lingers still in these

[1] Murray to Blackwood, *William Blackwood and his Sons*, i. 159.

[2] From 1830.

[3] *The Liberal*, 1822 (No. 2), vol. i. p. 371.

old friends, despite London manners and modern taste, more than a booksellers' tradition of the Edinburgh of Jeffrey and Lockhart.[1]

[1] The reader's attention has been requested in this chapter exclusively to the contributions of the Northern Augustans in criticism and *belles lettres*. He may feel that there is more to be said of the general indebtedness, as, for example, in the rise of the new school of historical writers in the eighteenth century, led by the three Scots, Hume, Smollett, and Robertson, and in the synchronous development of the historical study of literature, in the work of the great Printing-Clubs and the great Encyclopaedias. This more learned activity, though an expression of the engrained antiquarian habit of the Scot, was no mere matter of research and ingathering. If it owed something to the awakened critical spirit and imaginative energies of the period, it in turn served both well, and interested a wider public than the good folk of Edinburgh.

CHAPTER VIII

BURNS

A WRITER nowadays may well confess to some diffidence in approaching the subject of Burns. Such a "pitchy cloud" of opinion has enveloped his story, that even in the twentieth century there is some risk of losing the poet in the darkness of commentary on the perversities of earlier critics. It is so easy to be turned aside to questions of Burns's private life, or his merits as a reformer of old bawdry, or any other of the 'ethical' matters which are the proper business of literary prigs and all unliterary persons.

We must select our Burns; for there are at least three. There is the popular idol, the Burns of January festival, honoured in Scotland and wherever Scots gather together as no poet has been honoured in human history, and, if to alien eyes excessively, yet honoured not without cause. To have given a nation its songs, and expressed so unerringly the passion, and patriotism, and pathos and humour which stir its life and tradition,

were excuse for the wildest popular affection. The maudlin praise of the 'common Burnsite' has its value, not because of its intensity, but for, what is so rare in the history of ideas, its testimony to an undivided and continuing opinion throughout an entire community. For this reason the purely 'Scottish' Burns interests the coldest outsider as a remarkable, perhaps unique, instance of social and literary forces expressing themselves in terms of each other. There is, in the second place, the Burns of wider appeal, the 'friend of humanity' (in no *Anti-Jacobin* gibe), the poet of the generous instincts of the Common Race; born in the time of revolution, yet no revolutionary; peasant, yet no girder at great place; honest with Nature and her creatures, too honest with himself; speaking the *lingua franca* of the Universal Brotherhood, not of 'brither Scots.' The third Burns is the artist, the lyrist of unsurpassed vigour and sweetness, the guardian of a literary tradition and its renewer. After all is said, this is the true Burns. If we understand him thus, the Burns of Scottish idolatry is better understood and the Burns of European affection better explained. This Burns is perhaps the least known to our generation. The wide appreciation of his lyrics is, it is true, an acknowledgement of literary quality, but their appeal is that of the universal Burns; just as their Scottish *timbre* and colour constitute the appeal of

the national Burns. Pretty talk about an 'Ayrshire ploughman' and a 'peasant bard' tends to make us indifferent to his art for its own sake, or to its place in the process of literature, for one does not ask oneself to look for technical triumphs in verses thrown off by countrymen and gaugers. There is dialect too, to distress the foreigner and, not rarely, the modern Scot. So it falls out that we incline to take Burns either on very general terms and without much literary consideration, or on very particular 'kailyard' terms, as only the exponent, though the best, of the intimacies of Scottish life. It is a duty to discredit this emphasis, and to interpret him as a poet, and as a Scottish poet, in the light of his own *literary* accomplishment.

There is, in the judgements of contemporaries, some acknowledgement of this literary quality, though it is often but darkly hinted; a tinge of condescension in the congratulations by men to whom the origin and circumstance of work so excellent is matter of astonishment. We see it in Mackenzie's article in the *Lounger*,[1] perhaps less affectedly in Jeffrey's in the *Edinburgh*,[2] and in Scott's in the *Quarterly*.[3] Jeffrey showed only imperfect sympathy. It is, in fact, his sense of

[1] Dec. 9, 1786, No. xcvii.
[2] Jan. 1809, xiii., pp. 249 *et seq.*
[3] Feb. 1809, i., pp. 19 *et seq.*

fairness, or rather his judicial habit of stating a case 'for the other side,' for tradition in the face of novelty, that exposed him to wrath of the patriots. One sometimes wonders how Burns fared so well in the classical atmosphere of the Edinburgh of that day. Had he been overlooked, or been at most an evening exhibit in the Duchess of Gordon's saloon, we should not have been surprised. But we know from many sources, from that great lady herself, and from Sir Walter too, that there was something more than simple amazement at the rustic phenomenon. "No man's conversation," says the Duchess, "ever carried me so completely off my feet." Scott, in the account of the meeting in Adam Ferguson's house,[1] conveys an unmistakable sense of ease and good humour on the part of all concerned. There is nothing histrionic; no shock to these intellectuals and elegants; no hint of the rhetoric of Humanity or the rollick of Poosie Nansie's, without which the Burnsites cannot think of their poet. Perhaps he disturbs our enthusiastic moderns when they find him a sentimentalist dropping tears over a poor print, and the confessed reader of Sterne, 'The Man of Feeling,' and Macpherson.[2] There is something in this mutual recognition, which neither the patriotic Burns nor the cosmopolitan

[1] See p. 202, *supra*.

[2] Letter to John Murdoch, 15 Jan. 1783.

Burns can explain. Was it all a triumph of personality, the effect, as Lockhart hints,[1] of overpowering vigour and unguessed reserve upon "an isolated set of scholars"? Was it the victory of those flashing black eyes, the "fascinating conversation, the spontaneous eloquence of social argument, or the unstudied poignancy of brilliant repartee"?[2] For we are asked to believe, on the authority of a contemporary, that "Poetry (I appeal to all who had the advantage of being personally acquainted with him) was actually not his *forte*."[3]

Here we seem to see the genesis of that critical obsession of Burns the man. So strong has this interest in his personality been that when the glamour of his drawing-room fame had faded, there succeeded immediately the spell of the closing tragedy, in which miserable business posterity, with many shakings of the head, has busied itself to distraction. Wordsworth tangles his praise with condescending regret at the "admixture of useless, irksome, and painful details,"[3] and he is vexingly homiletic in his verses on the poet. When he would defend Burns against the "persevering Aristarch" of the *Edinburgh*, it is, as

[1] *Life of Burns.*

[2] The writer was a woman. See Lord Rosebery's Glasgow speech, 21 July, 1896 (Stirling, 1912, p. 28).

[3] Letter to James Gray, Jan. 1816.

Hazlitt well says, "only to bring him before a graver and higher tribunal, which is his own"[1]—before which tribunal there is much disorderly evidence on certain kinds of temperance. Even Carlyle, in his Essay, of deeper sympathy and sanity than most, tells us that "true and genial as his poetry must appear, it is not chiefly as a poet, but as a man, that he interests and affects us."[2] And again: "All that remains of Burns, the writings he has left, seem to us . . . no more than a poor mutilated fraction of what was in him. . . . His poems are, with scarcely any exception, mere occasional effusions; poured forth with little premeditation. . . . To try by the strict rules of Art such imperfect fragments would be at once unprofitable and unfair."[3] After which preamble of half-truth, Carlyle immediately proceeds to show that "there is something" in this defective record, "some sort of enduring quality" which must explain the continuing popularity, some claim to high art established. Then, having talked convincingly of Burns's literary character and art, he reverts to contemplation of the "sad end" and the sadder discourses thereon. And so the comment on intrigue and whisky rolls on, involving us all in irrelevance.

Let us decline to be drawn into this vortex. The

[1] *English Poets*, 1818, p. 256. [2] *Essays*, ii., p. 6.
[3] *Ib.*, p. 8.

censure may be right, or it may be wrong; we may like personal gossip, or we may not. What does it matter? If the question be asked, what would be our attitude to this body of verse if we knew less about Burns than we know about Shakespeare, if, indeed, the whole story had been blotted out, what must be the answer? Is there no voice in the works themselves? If they speak, on what grounds shall we conclude that the utterance is but a broken whisper of might-have-beens, 'a mutilated fragment' of what we should have had? In one respect we may agree with Carlyle, that what we have may be but a partial expression of the poet's power, that the man who wrote these poems might have written more, perhaps better still, had life's conditions been easier. But this assumption is only another way of congratulating ourselves on what we have.

It is a comfortable habit of criticism, when faced with the problem of explaining why Burns succeeded as he did in such unlikely conditions, to take refuge in the platitude that genius explains itself, that, when simple folk surpass the trained pupils of Apollo, it is by an act of the god—and "there's the end on't." When, as with Burns, there is great inequality in craftsmanship, even evidence of what would be called amateurishness in others, then we are told that Apollo was asleep or forgetful, and the peasant strummed as an

untaught peasant should. Genius of this sort, define it as we may, counts for much; so does happy circumstance. But they count only when they are aided or guided by the artist's conscience. The prophet has his noviciate before the message is given to him, and the measure of the world's applause is, after all is said, the measure of his right to convey it and of the manner of his conveying. Such a phrase as "an inspired ploughman" is mere froth of words, to cover our surprise and excuse our condescension. Burns was no untutored creature. His success among the select intelligences of Edinburgh would be testimony enough had we lost every line he wrote. That adjustment of his faculties to every situation which so astonished Dugald Stewart, his charm alike in drawing-room and tavern, his power of repartee, imply both the artist's sensitiveness and the artist's experience. It is not necessary to show how the facts of his schooling and family-life discredit the clodhopper theory.[1] We may perhaps exaggerate their importance, just as we may underrate them. There is better guidance for us in the poet's confidences. When writing to Mrs. Dunlop, in January

[1] "By the time I was ten or eleven years of age," he says, "I was a critic in substantives, verbs, and particles." (Letter to Dr. Moore, 2nd Aug., 1787.) He had reached to "sines and cosines," when a charming fillette "overset" his "trigonometry" (*ib.*); and he kept up a "literary correspondence" with his schoolfellows. "This," he adds, "improved me in composition," (*ib.*).

1787, on his Edinburgh welcome, intimating in grim prophecy that the "novelty of a poet in my obscure situation" cannot be sustained, he says, "I have studied myself, and know what ground I occupy." In the same month, he tells his literary confessor, Dr. Moore, that, apart from the insecurity of his social success with the 'polite and learned,' there are literary reasons why he cannot hope to retain his fame. Two years later, he unburdens himself thus to the same friend. "The character and employment of a poet were formerly my pleasure, but are now my pride. I know that a very great deal of my late éclat was owing to the singularity of my situation, and the honest prejudice of Scotsmen; but still, as I said in the preface to my first edition, I do look upon myself as having some pretensions from nature to the poetic character. I have not a doubt but the knack, the aptitude, to learn the Muses' trade, is a gift bestowed by Him 'who forms the secret bias of the soul'; but I as firmly believe that *excellence* in the profession is the fruit of industry, labour, attention, and pains. At least I am resolved to try my doctrine by the test of experience."[1] This resolve he had already put into practice, in the days on his father's farm, when he, "the most ungainly awkward boy in the parish," had for his familiars Shakespeare, the *Spectator*, Locke, Allan Ramsay,

[1] 4th Jan. 1789.

Boyle, Hervey, and, with others, *A Select Collection of English Songs*. "The Collection," he tells us, "was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them, driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true, tender, or sublime, from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic-craft, such as it is."[1] If believers in the figment of an 'unliterary' Burns had sufficient antiquarian enterprise to look at this Collection, *The Lark*,[2] an English-made miscellany of southern and northern song, with bits of Dryden, Congreve, Prior, Cibber, and others, they might begin to wonder what relish their plain peasant had for these things. In another place Burns says: "It is an excellent method in a poet, and what I believe every poet does, to place some favourite classic author, in his walks of study and composition, before him as a model." His letters to Dr. Moore about *Zeluco*[3] and to Alison about his essays on the principles of Taste[4] show how confirmed his interest in literary expression had become; and Cromek records a reply to a question about his habits of composition, that "all my poetry is the effect of easy composition, but of laborious correction."[5]

[1] Letter to Dr. Moore, 2nd August, 1787.
[2] London, 1740. There were later issues.
[3] 14th July, 1790; 28th Jan. 1791. [4] 14th Feb. 1791.
[5] *Reliques of Robert Burns*, 1808.

There is another heresy or half-heresy which must be thrown over, that Burns's greatness, as a song-writer, is mainly derived from the fact that he was fortunate in having a rich tradition for the stimulation of his power, circumstances unusually helpful, and an age and country peculiarly responsive. In other words, had Scotland not been already a land of song and the Scottish peasantry and *bourgeoisie* in the mood they were, we should not have had this Burns. Goethe gave currency to this view. "How is he great," he said to Eckermann, "except through the circumstance that the whole songs of his predecessors lived in the mouth of the people—that they were, so to speak, sung at his cradle; that, as a boy, he grew up amongst them, and the high excellence of these models so pervaded him that he had therein a living basis on which he could proceed further? Again, why is he great, but from this, that his own songs at once found susceptible ears amongst his compatriots; that, sung by reapers and sheaf-binders, they at once greeted him in the field; and that his boon-companions sang them to welcome him at the ale-house?"[1] Let us, by all means, admit this happy circumstance, but do not let us allow too little to the artist's individuality, or forget that in his reworking of the traditional stuff the approach and touch are always literary. Editing may be a

[1] *Conversations*, tr. Oxenford, 1883, p. 254.

great art, and Burns's, at its best or worst, may be something more than merely clever.

It is not necessary to go closely into the details of the historical evidence. There are very few of the poems which are entirely kinless or which cannot claim some sort of Scottish cousinship. If, for example, we open the Kilmarnock edition and take the first ten pieces in order, we find the first, *The Twa Dogs*, and the sixth, *The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie*, in the octosyllabic couplet, an old favourite in Scots from the days of the Makars but most familiar as the metre of the people's great book, Barbour's *Bruce*; the second on *Scotch Drink*, the third, *The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer*, the fifth, *Address to the Deil*, the seventh, *Poor Mailie's Elegy*, the eighth, the *Epistle to James Smith*, and the tenth, *The Vision*, in the so-called 'Burns stanza,' an old Troubadour form often used in Middle English, and a favourite in Scotland from the fifteenth century, and notably in the work of the poet's immediate predecessors, from 'standard Habbie'[1] to Ramsay, Hamilton of Gilbertfield, and Fergusson; the fourth, *The Holy Fair*, and the ninth, *A Dream*, in the bob-wheel stanza, traceable in genealogical ascent, from Fergusson and Alexander Scott, back to *Christ's Kirk on the Green* and *Peblis to the Play* and the earlier *Sir Tristrem*. In

[1] *Piper of Kilbarchan.*

choice of subject, too, there are many ties with the past. In these ten poems the evidence is amply illustrative. It is enough to state that *The Twa Dogs* recalls Fergusson's *Planestanes and Causey*, *Scotch Drink* the same poet's *Cauler Water*, and *The Holy Fair* his *Leith Races* and *Hallow Fair*, and that *Poor Mailie's Elegy* is, like Tam Samson, directly reminiscent of the elegiac efforts of Ramsay on Maggie Johnston and others, as Ramsay's verses are of the ever-famous Piper. Then there is the not less clear, if less conscious, relationship in sentiment and manner, as shown, say, between the *Address to the Deil* and Dunbar's *Kynd Kittok*.[1] All these things, however, are of less moment to the critics who have set their hearts on an 'editorial' Burns than his deliberate recasting of old texts, even of some which remained familiar to his generation. There is the stock illustration of the classic verses of *Auld Lang Syne*. Watson in his *Collection* of 1711 printed a poem of *Old Long Syne*, which is now ascribed to Francis Sempill, though there is some evidence for believing that it is a recension of still older matter.[2] The first stanza runs:—

> "Should old acquaintance be forgot
> And never thought upon,

[1] See *supra*, p. 26.

[2] On the evidence of the popularity of the poem before Burns's time, see Henley and Henderson's edition, vol. iii., pp. 408-410.

The Flames of Love extinguished
And freely past and gone?
Is thy kind Heart now grown so cold
In that Loving Breast of thine,
That thou can'st never once reflect
On Old-long-syne?"

This is transformed by Ramsay[1]:—

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
Tho' they return with scars?
These are the noble hero's lot,
Obtain'd in glorious wars:
Welcome, my Varo, to my breast,
Thy arms about me twine,
And make me once again as blest,
As I was lang syne."

On this Burns builds his first stanzas[2]:—

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And auld lang syne?

We twa ha'e run about the braes
And pu'd the gowans fine;
But we've wander'd mony a weary foot,
Sin' auld lang syne."

When we continue through the familiar lines, we feel how far we have wandered from the 'Flames of Love' and the noble Varo, and how beside Burns's four-lined chorus Watson's sounds but a

[1] *Tea Table Miscellany*, i. 51.

[2] As in George Thomson's *Select Melodies*, ii. 19, "from a MS. in the editor's possession," given by the poet.

jingle.[1] Here, if anywhere, we are bidden to test the critic's dictum that Burns's "function was not origination but treatment, and that in treatment it is that the finer qualities of his endowment are best expressed and displayed."[2] What appeals to us in the *Auld Lang Syne* which we know is Burns's own ; what he preserves of the old material is preserved because it has passed the tests of his art. This is the 'peasant-poet's' unoriginality, his cobbling of other men's stuff! We prefer to think that by discarding what is least worthy and by substituting his own excellences, he has done something more. The trail of the mere editor is not upon this work.

Burns's 'indebtedness,' especially in song—his following of old themes, his retuning of old rhythms, his carrying over of phrase and line and verse—has an interest for us over and above its testimony to his literary insight and craftsmanship. Popular criticism has sometimes asked the question, Why did Burns so concern himself with other men's work, if he shows such power of discriminating between successes and failures and of recovering the failures to honour? Why did he

[1] "On old long syne,
On old long syne, my jo,
On old long syne :
That thou canst never once reflect
On old long syne."

[2] Henley, *Essay on Burns, u.s.* iv. p. 325.

not give his imagination a freer course? It is foolish to ask why a poet did not do certain things, or why, having done good work 'of his own,' he did not do more. It might be replied, under compulsion, that, for one reason or another, there is ground for suspecting that the Burns we know might not have been able, with his short life-opportunity, to produce more 'original' verse or anything better than these inspired recensions; but the question may well be declined. If a more professional ambition had driven him only to 'novelties,' the gain to his reputation and to us might not have balanced the loss. When his dealings with the earlier vernacular are considered, two things are borne in upon us. In the first place, we see that he re-expressed the old motives of Scottish poetry—so convincingly that his statement is accepted as completely representative—and saved them from neglect, perhaps from oblivion. This is the reason why Scottish gratitude has gone forth to him so freely; and why outside criticism has so readily, and without much risk, made him the sole medium for helping it to its knowledge of Scottish genius. In the second place, the character of this dealing supplies the strongest proof of what may be called the literary intelligence of the poet. His use of this strewn material, lingering in oral tradition, blown about in broadsheets, or disguised by 'polite' plagiarists, is too careful and persistent

to show nothing more than the poet's necessity. We seem to see a deliberate choice, even if the poet had not told us of his patriotic resolve; and we recognize the literary insight which suggested or compelled that choice. We cannot think of his use of these old channels, which won him a free passage to the heart of the nation, as merely accidental or the lazy observance of tradition. After all, do we not juggle with the blessed words 'recension' and 'treatment' overmuch? We are better served by 'channel' or 'mould,' for in fifty cases, as striking as that of *Auld Lang Syne*, what he has poured in—words sparkling like the mountain stream, or molten from the crucible of passion—is his own.

In passing from this 'editorial' heresy we encounter another, subtler perhaps, because it appears to allow more to the poet's artistic originality. We are reminded of Burns's 'homeliness,' and told that he is above all things great because he sang of simple life as no one had done before him. On this little more need be said than to recall Stevenson's dictum that Burns succeeds less by his choice of themes than by his power of "writing well"—the only criterion by which posterity can separate the literary sheep from the literary goats. "It was by his style, and not by his matter, that he affected Wordsworth and the world." And again: "If Burns helped to change the course of

literary history, it was by his frank, direct, and masterly utterance, and not by his homely choice of subjects. . . . He wrote from his own experience because it was his nature so to do, and the tradition of the school from which he proceeded was fortunately not opposed to homely subjects. But to these homely subjects he communicated the rich commentary of his nature; they were all steeped in Burns; and they interest us not in themselves, but because they have been passed through the spirit of so genuine and vigorous a man. Such is the stamp of living literature; and there was never any more alive than that of Burns."[1] It is his literary alertness which saves the movement of his ideas, his descriptions, his phrasing, from the failure which dogs the mere limner in words; and not a little of the credit which we give to his Doric speech is reflected from himself.[2] We see the full meaning of this when we look on the gulf between his work and that of any of the crowd of writers whom he inspired. He showed a way, and so many have tried to follow, as the Lydgates and Occleves, minor and more minor, tried to follow Dan Chaucer. He is their 'springing well,' and 'A per se,' and 'lantern'; they and their critical friends, like the older poet's admirers, are but feeble tricklings and glintings. These tarry at the "sources from which the

[1] *Men and Books*, pp. 86-87. [2] *Cf. ib.*, p. 84.

materials for the imagery" of Poetry are drawn, and win the experience which does not "constitute men Poets, but only prepares them to be the auditors of those who are."[1] Burns, like Shelley, was "familiar with mountains and lakes," had seen "populous cities," had "conversed with living men of genius"; but posterity, in its critical moods, bears him some grudge that he narrowed his range. It chides him for cribbing his talents, and forgets the transforming power, the alertness in adjustment, the gift of the poet's self, which so few, even the greatest, have offered so freely.

The poetry of Burns was a further contribution by Scotland to the Romantic stir in which the verse of Thomson and Macpherson had done so much, but it was, in its vigour and direction, so unlike these earlier forces that many who were the first to admire felt only the attraction of its novelty. Its strangeness and strength secured for it a welcome by a jaded literature already partly refreshed by the 'new poetry.' Later, when reflection followed their first enthusiasm, Englishmen had to explain to themselves why they so frankly allowed Burns his place, and why they met the difficulties of a strange dialect and an alien setting so amiably.

The exhilaration produced by the revel of the Romantics in Nature and the Past gave Burns his

[1] Shelley, Preface to *Revolt of Islam*.

opportunity. For in literature, as in life, reaction is itself the begetter of reaction; and though it was a new pleasure to moralize in terms of the *Seasons* or indulge the misty sentiments of Morven, such pleasure soon palled. It is difficult for us to realize the fascination of the change offered by Burns from apostrophes to the Powers

> "That o'er the garden and the rural seat
> Preside,"[1]

to Addresses to the Deil; from the haughty stride of the Chief of Moma, 'like a cloud, the robe of ghosts,'[2] to the 'randie, gangrel bodies,' who

> "In Poosie-Nansie's held the splore,
> To drink their orra duddies";[3]

from Musidora's swain to the lover of Mary Morison. Indeed, so violent is the contrast that we may wonder how it pleased English ears except as a discord. But Burns's style, his art of 'writing well,' his literary genius, and nothing else, found the harmonies. These found, the strangeness became not only more attractive but reasonable.

What were the elements of novelty? There was first a new scenery—village-street, hillside, corn-rigs, wimplin' burns, auld clay biggins—a score of settings unknown to the Crabbes and Cowpers and other 'innovators'; and, with these, unusual situations, surprises of character and senti-

[1] *Seasons*, 'Autumn,' ll. 1037 *et seq.*
[2] *Temora*, p. 54. [3] *Jolly Beggars*, i.

ment. In the second place, Burns offered a sheaf of new-old metres; old to England, but a discovery to the good folk of the eighteenth century, and lively enough entertainment to them after their Pindaric gambolling. Thirdly, there was the Doric, in many places puzzling (perhaps therefore not unattractive), but more often, by its sprinklings of quaint or vigorous words, giving nuances and graces which the statelier southern speech had overslipped. This early and continuing commendation of Burns in spite of difficulties of language is testimony to the power of the poet rather than of the tongue which he used. For though the elements of his medium are not, except on rare occasions, of his making, their ordering is his; and in that ordering they acquire values which dictionary and peasant-usage and the literary practice of Ramsay and Fergusson and other predecessors fail to disclose. There was in this English admiration the acknowledgement that Burns had found for the world latent powers in the language, which, without him, might have been lost, even to Scots. If the medium was an aid to Burns, he more than repaid his debt to it. No one but he could have sent the great public to wrestle with dialect as he has done. If lines like

> "A daimen icker in a thrave
> 'S a sma' request" [1]

[1] *To a Mouse*, iii.

fail to remove from English and foreign minds the suspicion that such a vocabulary is unnecessarily thorny or obscure, there are hundreds where the value of pure dialect is frankly admitted to be worth all the trouble of unravelling. For example, in the *Brigs of Ayr* the description of the torrent is carried through so vigorously that the Englishman feels that the line at the close,

"And dash the gumlie jaups up to the pouring skies,"

must be as good as the rest. Burns established the credit of dialect. What Scott was to do for northern countryside and character, he did for northern speech. By his art strange things were made familiar and the South became sensitive for the first time, and perhaps as fully as it can ever be, to the timbre of modern Scotticism.

The influence exerted by Burns upon contemporary literature gave vogue to Scotticism which the other Northern pioneers failed to secure—Thomson, Macpherson, the Critics, even the nameless and named writers of the Ballads. Thomson loses his identity in the general English and Continental revel in Nature; the curiosity of a few foreign tourists to see the country of the Ossianic bards soon dies out and *Fingal* returns to its literary mists; the Edinburgh of Jeffrey and Lockhart, having inspired London, yields not unamiably. But Burns remains the Scot. "The appellation

of a Scottish bard is by far my highest pride; to continue to deserve it is my most exalted ambition." [1] He achieved his wish, and more. For his greatness is not only a Scottish matter, that he recovered the true 'race' of northern literature and discovered the Scots to themselves, but the affair of the wide world of letters, that he found for it the enjoyment of a fresh purpose, and from the springs of experience, so national or even local, replenished the common cisterns of Poetry.

[1] Letter to Mrs. Dunlop, 22nd March, 1787.

CHAPTER IX

SCOTT

SCOTLAND had something more to offer to the Romantic Movement, and to literatures greater and older than hers. This fresh incentive she and her neighbours received from Sir Walter Scott. He was but dimly conscious of the significance of the part which he played in the literary change.[1] Training, social circumstance, taste, all inclined him to the 'constitutional party' in letters, and he was more than once prompted to open confession of sympathy with the Northern Augustans. Though he was a lover of Nature and was attracted by the heroic past as few have been, he had no kinship with Thomson and Macpherson. His interest in the ballads was, with all its antiquarianism, no mere tradition of Percy and the editors, and it worked to a different end. He seems to stand apart from all the protagonists of the new Romanticism by his measured passion. He discloses no compelling force behind him, no

[1] See *supra*, chapter vii., pp. 201 *et seq.*

missionary zeal to an unregenerate art, no connoisseurship in sensation or emotion. He contributes no new ideas, as more excited contemporaries understood their duty: unlike these contemporaries, he seems to be strangely indifferent to such things, at least for their own sake. Yet, though all this be admitted, we count him one of the primary forces in transforming the literary habit of the early nineteenth century.

Much of Scott's influence flowed from his personality. He is rarely judged on purely literary grounds. His age gave but passing thought to these, though, as its taste changed and it turned from the verse it had at first hailed as of the best, it felt compelled with fatuous regret to profess that it did so in the name of art. Ours, too, when it thinks of him, thinks rather of the man, and, when it would excuse its inexcusable indifference, makes pretence of critical dislike of the whims and faults of 'buff-jerkined' romance.

> "Why take the style of those heroic times?
> For nature brings not back the Mastodon,
> Nor we those times; and why should any man
> Remodel models?"

Scott holds his own, as it were by the sheer momentum of character which won for him the triumphs of his lifetime. He does not tempt the biographers to homily, as Burns by an ill fate so often does. The tragic decline, not less tragic than

the other, only discloses further proof of his spiritual vigour. Outbursts like Hazlitt's,[1] or even the gentler Hunt's, are mere dog-day frenzy, which their authors would forget and we are ready to forgive. We admire Scott's energy and reserve, his amiability and honesty—above all, his sanity; and we have no difficulty, with or without Lockhart's canvas, in understanding why a personality which so stirred the enthusiasm of its generation has had effects so wide and abiding.

It is not inconsistent with what has been hinted about Scott's reserve or lack of high passion to find the source of his influence in his attractive vigour, in his frank delight in action; but some explanation may be required. Although, unlike so many of his contemporaries, he refrained from critical exposition of his purpose, either by analysing his sympathies with eighteenth century tradition, or by explaining his indifference to so much in the new movement, he did perhaps more than any preface-writing poet or exuberant essayist to give that movement confidence in itself. His effect was tonic. He has described himself, to his friend Miss Seward, as "a rattle-sculled half-lawyer, half-sportsman, through whose head a regiment of horse has been exercising since he was five years old."[2] All his work, both verse and prose, shows this spirited, yet orderly, bearing.

[1] We do not forget his praise. [2] Lockhart, *Life*, ii. 259.

His is an atmosphere which is neither sultry with convention, nor cyclonic, but clear and bracing, stirring the reader as hill-air quickens the steps and attunes the nerves. He is sustained by an electric force which gives him untiring energy in his craftsmanship and abounding happiness in the performance, and which conveys to others a wholesome sense of exhilaration. In this respect he appeals not only to the armchair reader, as Lockhart shows us in his Torres Vedras anecdote. When the *Lady of the Lake* reached Sir Adam Ferguson that officer was posted with his company on a point of ground so exposed to the enemy's artillery that the men had been ordered to take a lying position. "While they kept that attitude, the Captain, kneeling at their head, read aloud the description of the battle in Canto VI.,[1] and the listening soldiers only interrupted him by a joyous huzza, whenever the French shot struck the bank close above them."[2] What Scott could do for the individual, or for soldiers in action, he has done for literature. He confirmed and gave wider vogue to the romantic mood, and supplied to the general what more purposeful verse or the exhortations of critics could not secure. If his art had not the mettle of Pegasus, it served better the Bellero-

[1] Canto VI. xvi., beginning—
'Their light-arm'd archers far and near.'

[2] *Life*, iii. 327.

phons of Romance; and we should have lost exceedingly, had it careered heavenwards through the wrack of the *Sturm und Drang*. He cantered an indolent age comfortably into enjoyment of the new fervours of literature, taught it the pleasures of the morning-saddle and spring air, gave it the zest of doing and moving, as no Pegasus-antics of higher-bred art could have done.

We have already referred to Scott's work in illustration of the two dominant moods of Scottish literature, and hinted that though it is effective in its treatment of detail[1] and in its descriptive method, it is less successful in expressing its fantastic humours.[2] He has been called the "Wizard of the North," happily enough, if we have a care in determining how his spells were laid. We give to the term 'wizardry,' as applied to writers of Scott's time, a Radcliffian sense of Terror and Wonder, an association with "browneis and bogillis" and other things of their kind. This, in spite of occasional dealings with Goblins and White Ladies, has small claim upon his art. He is a wizard because he called up the past, found a

[1] See chapter i., *supra*, pp. 6 *et seq.* R. L. Stevenson has noted this. "In literature the great change of the past century has been effected by the admission of detail. It was inaugurated by the romantic Scott; and at length, by the semi-romantic Balzac and his more or less wholly unromantic followers, bound like a duty on the novelist."—*The Art of Writing*, 'A Note on Realism,' 1910 ed., p. 98.

[2] See chapter ii., *supra*, p. 63.

fresh purpose for the dross of common fact, discovered to the world and to the Scots themselves a new vision of northern scenery and history and character. "We owe to him, as a people," said Lord Meadowbank on the memorable occasion when the 'Great Unknown' was compelled to make public confession of his authorship of the Waverley Novels,[1] "a large and heavy debt of gratitude. 'He it is who has opened to foreigners the grand and characteristic beauties of our country. It is to him that we owe that our gallant ancestors and illustrious patriots . . . have obtained a fame no longer confined to the boundaries of a remote and comparatively obscure country. It is he who has called down upon their struggles for glory and freedom the admiration of foreign lands. He it is who has conferred a new reputation on our national character, and bestowed on Scotland an imperishable name, were it only by her having given birth to himself." There is the historical and social side of Scott's wizardry. Byron's compliment to him as the "Ariosto of the North" gives the more literary aspect of his "magic line" and "new creation."[2]

We can realize, at least as well as a later generation can, the pleasure of contrast which Scott's

[1] At the Theatrical Dinner, on 23rd Feb. 1827. See Introduction to *Chronicles of the Canongate*, Author's edit., vol. xli., pp. l-li., and Lockhart, *Life*, ix. 81. The texts vary slightly.

[2] *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, IV. xl.

verse and novels gave to his contemporaries—a contrast not merely with the lingering mood against which Romanticism was striving, but with so much of the matter and manner of that Romanticism itself. It has been a custom with us to dismiss the subject by saying that it was by his appeal to antiquity, or, as some uncomfortable people prefer to call it, his antiquarianism, that Scott arrested the attention of his age; as if the choice of old stories or a mania for fancy-dress or rusty iron could explain his reception by it and by ours. The "business of buff-jerkins" was no new thing, even as a fashionable craze in literature. It had helped the New School in its first efforts. Everybody but the stragglers of the Cult of Twickenham thought in terms of basnets and flying buttresses. Scott only offered to his age what it was already familiar with; he had no protest to make, in the valiant way of some of his contemporaries. Yet we cannot, if we show any precision in our estimate, consider him as a mere *laudator temporis acti*, deliberately turning to the past to spite the present for its restlessness and emotional shoddy; or, with Hazlitt in one of his critical lapses, as a political plotter, working against the holy 'spirit of the age,' self-dedicated to reform.[1] Nor may we consider him as a mere antiquary offering to his contemporaries a sort of museum-refuge from the

[1] *The Spirit of the Age*, 'Scott.'

clamour and traffic of letters, or, at worst, indulging his own taste in curios or advertising his cabinets at Abbotsford. None of these Scotts could have lived long in the affection of his fellows, or live still with us.

We are tempted to counter these views by saying that we can read Scott not only without being attracted or repelled by his antiquarian learning, but without recognizing it. Both those who condemn and those who excuse make an extraordinary fuss about nothing. It is all a question of style, or a matter of 'vocabulary.' Sir Walter thought and wrote in a language of his own. He found his medium for a time in the traditions of the Middle Ages, and he worked in it easily. Others, ignorant of it, or carried away by zeal for things modern and prone to consider that all other things are inferior, find themselves unsympathetic. It is a problem of taste or of instinct; perhaps as much of training. Critics who gird at Scott's medieval setting remind one of the censors of hard words pilloried by Dr. Johnson. "Words are hard," he retorted, "only to those who do not understand them; and the critic ought always to inquire, whether he is incommoded by the fault of the writer, or by his own."[1] Scott's censurers dislike the paraphernalia of chivalry because they do not understand them, and, disliking them, suggest that

[1] *The Idler*, No. 70.

he has created difficulties for himself. If they go further and say, what Johnson, in the same place, says of one sort of author, that he "involves his thoughts in voluntary obscurity" and merely "boasts his learning," we must at once measure swords with them. Scott may, at odd moments, give the impression of being over-curious in antiquarian detail, just as the Great Cham sometimes distresses his friends by an overstrained delight in a rotund vocabulary; but this is no reason for thinking of the author of the Waverley Novels as little better than a Captain Grose, any more than for our joining in the foolish libel of Johnsonese. Just as Johnson's learning can never destroy his reputation as the clearest and most direct of writers, so Scott's armorial style never obscures the simple purpose of his art. If he shows the 'rust' of antiquity, he also conveys its 'freshness.'[1] In ballad, in his more ambitious verse, in novel, he speaks with the voice of the past, not because it is an ancient and strange voice, but because it is living and pleasing; not because it is quaint, but because it is simple and clear. This, and this only, explains why he enchanted his generation, and offered relief, alike from the conventional cadences and the fashionable experiments in discord. Lockhart, in the guise of Peter Morris, tells us what this revel in the Past did for his age. "By enquiring

[1] Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, 'Byron.'

into and representing the modes of life in earlier times, [Scott] employs the imagination of his countrymen, as a means of making them go through the personal experience of their ancestry, and of making them acquainted with the various courses of thought and emotion by which their forefathers had their genius and characters drawn out—things to which, by the mechanical arrangements of modern life and society, we have been rendered too much strangers."[1] Scott's contemporaries probably did not see, as well as we can, how, incidentally to this new enjoyment, their historical sense was refreshed. If his presentation of olden days is sometimes imaginary, or extravagant, and if he takes more than Shakespeare's allowance of freedom, to the vexing of the precisians in history, his perspective is rarely distorted to indulge a craving for the picturesque, or thrown out of scale to humour a tedious antiquarianism. He never pretended to historical accuracy. As the literary son of the Minstrels he had no mind to forgo his heritage for a quest of pedantries. His right to the name of Wizard rests not more on the new visions and fervours which he created for posterity, than on the method by which he drew the curtain of antiquity between his age and its intellectual prepossessions. For great as was his recovery of the simpler life and ideals of a

[1] *Peter's Letters*, ii. 350.

forgotten past, not less great was the immediate effect of the manner of that recovery, in making modern life and art more sensitive to the simpler feelings. No antiquary or vainly bookish person ever achieved this.

It is in this simplicity that we find Scott's position of contrast with so many around him, his strength, and his appeal to his time. It is the criterion of his romanticism. It is a protest against artificiality on the one hand and extravagance on the other, and in its association with 'movement'—for Scott finds his descriptive opportunity in the stirring business of life rather than in the psychology of feeling—a protest against both the stagnation which ensued after a spell of artifice and the bewilderment into which the search for novelty had thrown men's minds. Washington Irving tells us that when he commented on the bareness of the Border scenery, Scott replied: "I like the very nakedness of the land; it has something bold, and stern, and solitary about it. When I have been for some time in the rich scenery about Edinburgh, which is like ornamented garden land, I begin to wish myself back again among my own honest grey hills; and if I did not see the heather, at least once a year, *I think I should die.*"[1] In further conversation, about the Laidlaws and a woman friend who had been invited to meet the

[1] Lockhart, *Life*, v., pp. 248-249.

American, Scott remarked: "I wished to show you some of our really excellent, plain Scotch people; not fine gentlemen and ladies, for such you can meet everywhere, and they are everywhere the same"; and, of the last, "she's a fine old Scotch girl, and I delight in her more than in many a fine lady I have known, and I have known many of the finest."[1] Anecdotes like these, corroborated by other gossip in Lockhart, help to explain how Scott was even more successful in the novels of Scottish life nearer his own time. They perhaps throw some further light on his much discussed 'antiquarianism,' by making it, too, appear as a desire for intimacy, and an effort to put the barons bold as much at their ease with himself and his readers as the Bailie and Dominie are, or as barons bold may care to be. The simple taste of the Grand Seigneur, then building and planting his Abbotsford, is reflected in his literary mood, even in his pictures of these barons and their dames and tourneys. There is nothing exotic, or 'oriental,' or sensuous in these processional panels; nothing of the cheap mystery of Castles of Otranto or the fantastic splendour of pleasure-domes in Xanadu. One sometimes wonders how such simple hearts beat under these magnificent accoutrements; but one wonders less when one notes how the whole scene moves. There is no time to be introspec-

[1] Lockhart, *Life*, v., pp. 251-252.

tive, or morbid, or affected. In this breezy mood there can be no cobwebs. It is the "vitality" of his art which "preserves it from putrefaction." This is true, also, in those rarer passages when Scott turns psychologist; as in the lines in the *Lay* describing the hesitation of the Aged Minstrel to play before the Duchess and her ladies.[1] Pitt's well-known comment[2] on this passage helps us to understand how the colour and realism of the New Poetry revealed themselves to an age used to decorative and symbolic method, but it misses the element which makes these qualities so vivid. For it is Scott's rapid progression from one gentle touch to another, his refusal, or inability, to rest and analyse, which gives the lines their character. He takes the ups and downs of the old man's feeling at a canter. Now this is just what pictorial art does not do, and cannot do, even in our cinematographic days; and we have here, from another point of view, further proof of the difference between Scott's art and the painter's—between the panoramic effect and the "caught movement."

So far then, Scott has the credit of disclosing to his age the more essential and abiding qualities of Romanticism, or, at the very least, of confirming and encouraging it in its appreciation of them. Though, from the historical point of view, his atti-

[1] Introduction, *Poetical Works*, vi. 46-48.

[2] Quoted *supra*, p. 8, n.

tude may be considered as a 'protest' against both the conventional and anarchic moods which were struggling with each other, and though this term has been used in this chapter for critical convenience, it is better to interpret his influence in a more disengaged sense. Let it be repeated that he was for the most part unconscious of the part which he played. For this reason it may be that he played so well. He supplied an atmosphere, a tonic, a fresh motive—call it what we like—which genius of a higher order has so often failed to do by more provocative methods.

Scott however did more than this; he gave not only to English but to the world's literature the Historical Novel. Prose fiction has always claimed the right to reconstruct the past, and has exercised it more freely than either satire or drama has done; but in all that had been written during the double millennium before the nineteenth century there is nothing to be found which can be called a historical novel in the sense understood by that century and by ours. There are, of course, different types, and perhaps a hint or two of approach towards the modern genre. The reader has access to a concise account[1] of the stages from the 'philosophic novel' of the Greeks through the 'epical novel' of

[1] Saintsbury, *Essays in English Literature, 1780-1860, Second Series*, 1895, pp. 303 *et seq.*

Rome to the medieval romance, when the confusion of the differences between what could be accepted as history and what should be taken as romance becomes so remarkable. The Arcadian efforts of the sixteenth century are almost a deliberate reversion to classical types; and the painful folios of the seventeenth, with their Gallic Cyruses and Cassandras and their English copies, make no show, notwithstanding their affectation of history, of spiriting readers away from the familiar interests of the age of the Grand Monarch. Nor in the more allegorical, and satirical, delights of books like the *New Atlantis* is any advance to be looked for. We are still leagues from the Waverley conception of how the novel should be 'historical'; and, what is not the least remarkable fact, hardly an ell nearer in Scott's immediate predecessors. For the antique setting in Walpole and Clara Reeve, and in Mrs. Radcliffe and Godwin not less, is a more ludicrous jumble than when medieval writers placed Melchizedek, Aristotle, and Godfrey cheek by jowl, or stage-managers put Hector in trunks and Cleopatra in a commode; and of historical 'sentiment' these writers show not a scrap. For the rest of the story of the preparation for the Waverley Novels, Scott is himself the best chronicler, in the *apologia* of 1829, offered as a General Preface to the 'Author's Edition.' There, in a fragment of a tale of chivalry "in the

style of the *Castle of Otranto*," written by him at an early date and incorporated in 1808 in the chapters continuing Strutt's *Queen-hoo Hall*, and in his observations on these first ventures,[1] the interest to us is not so much in what he had tried to do, as in what he was saved from doing, both by his own talent and by accident, when he seriously began his career as novelist. "*Queen-hoo Hall*," he tells us, "was not very successful. I thought I was aware of the reason, and supposed that, by rendering his language too ancient, and displaying his antiquarian knowledge too liberally, the ingenious author had raised up an obstacle to his own success. Every work designed for mere amusement must be expressed in language easily comprehended; and when, as is sometimes the case in *Queen-hoo Hall*, the author addresses himself exclusively to the Antiquary, he must be content to be dismissed by the general reader with the criticism of Mungo, in *The Padlock*,[2] on Mauritanian music, 'What signifies me here, if me no understand?' I conceived it possible to avoid this error; and by rendering a similar work more light and obvious to general comprehension, to escape the rock on which my predecessor was

[1] Both the fragment and the continuation are printed in the Appendix in the 'Author's Edition.'

[2] A Comic Opera by Isaac Bickerstaffe (Drury Lane, 1768), based on Cervantes's 'Jealous Husband,' in the *Exemplary Novels*.

shipwrecked."[1] Scott deals with the matter too modestly, for he confines himself to the Mungo plea of intelligibility, all-important no doubt, and incidentally very interesting to us in respect of later opinion on his own 'antiquarian' obscurity. We are in a better position to estimate the general character of his experiment and its permanent effects.

The most essential difference between his art of romance and that of each and all of his predecessors lies in what may be called, for lack of a better description, its fuller co-ordination. He succeeds where others had failed in the reconstruction of history in an imaginative medium, first, by reason of the more extended range of his historical sympathies, his ampler equipment, and his more catholic taste as a *virtuoso*, and, secondly, as an effect in part of that fuller acquaintance, by reason of his power of co-ordinating his material. How much richer is his picture in its colouring and how much better composed, how much truer and more complete than anything that came from the crowd of second- and fifth-rate novelists of the opening of the nineteenth century! If the reader has no opportunity of tasting these books for himself (for an effort to feast upon them would produce the worst results), he may turn to Mr. Saintsbury's lively chapters in his history of the English Novel,[2]

[1] General Preface, *Waverley Novels*, I. pp. xvi.-xvii.

[2] *The English Novel*. London, 1913

where enough is quoted to show that "the failure in verisimilitude is practically universal," in volumes less funnily stupid than Henrietta Mosse's *Peep at Our Ancestors* (1807). We do not laugh at them for their errors in description, even though these be many, because we are unwilling to admit fussy pedants in this business, and because Bohemia has long had an undisputed right to its seaboard. They do not give us a Bohemia of any kind, either landward or littoral. They have some knowledge of it; they are very learned in certain things; but their knowledge is partial, and so concerned with externals that the reader cannot surrender himself to the illusion. They may be, with certain allowances, very informing persons in the forgotten lore of heraldry, or falconry, or architecture, or village customs, or troopers' oaths, but they are seldom cunning in all these; and of the more spiritual matters which constitute society old or new—literature and art and religion—they know little or nothing and have no use for them on their canvas. *They* are the "mere antiquaries"; *they* lack the "vitality" which preserves art from "putrefaction."[1] It is *they* who help us to understand his greatness as the creator of the historical novel. For it is by the multiplicity of his interests in the past, his range of sympathy, and the intimacy of

[1] On their "dragging-in" of historical details "by head and shoulders," see Scott's *Journal*, under 18th Oct. 1826.

his style that we separate him from all the *chiffonniers* of romance. This intimacy is not, as some have thought, merely an effect of his extensive erudition. Without his natural vivacity and simplicity, learning would not have served him half so well as it did. Without these we should not have had, for example, that expressive dialogue which more than anything else convinces the reader of the historical reasonableness of the narrative. Is there anything before these Novels which realizes so fully to the modern the sentiment and character of earlier society; or anything which makes characters, especially the villains, express themselves so directly, without giving us the crude *ipsissima verba*, the oaths and obscenities in which we know they must have indulged?[1] Scott's personages speak to each other and to us as good acting speaks to us. We forget the 'properties' in the directness of the appeal. The setting, with all its detail, is often as immaterial to the enjoyment of the book, as the spectacular whims of our theatre-managers are to the enjoyment of the acted Shakespeare. Let us go further, and say, once

[1] Some contemporaries found, with Heber's correspondent Adolphus, that Scott failed in his rare attempts at "scenes of bold and unmitigated vulgarity," and, thinking of his ill-success in portraying "the reckless and ribald audacity of the 'lewd rabble'," were reminded of the "economical humorist in Miss Burney's *Cecilia*, who appears at a masquerade with the borrowed suit of a real chimney-sweeper" (*Letters to Richard Heber, Esq.*, 1821, pp. 91-92). This qualification, if accepted, only throws all that they, and we, find so successful into stronger relief.

again for the benefit of the critics who think only of a buff-jerkined Scott, that the antique setting is, in no paradoxical sense, an accident of Scott's mood. Early circumstances guided his choice, but he was never wedded to it, as the collector is to his hobby. He soon became "satisfied that the manners of the Middle Ages did not possess the interest which [he] had conceived;"[1] and he turned to Highland story and the Edinburgh of his own day. His success in each and all, and especially in the last, shows not only how well he could "make up" for each part, but that he could play so many to the life. He showed the world of letters what could be done in these antique disguisings, but also that historical and romantic tale-telling is more than a mummer's business. If, for a time, he had poor imitators, and, later, few, if any, rivals in his own craft, his example proved good to the whole fraternity of authorship—not least perhaps in giving the Historical Novel a place of dignity among the other genres of the modern workshop, and the stimulus of an almost unlimited variety of subject. The classical tradition of fiction was shattered. In Scott's art the narrow medievalism of the earlier stages of the new romanticism yielded to the intimacies of the generations that had just passed, then to those of the writer's time; but that was only a beginning,

[1] General Preface, *Waverley Novels*, I., p. xvii.

for the Historical Novel learned to know no bounds this side of Peru. It may be doubted whether without Scott's lesson we should have had those 'historical' tales of imaginary lands which have no history and, unlike the old-fashioned Utopias, are not the mere toy of the satirist. Further, we may ask ourselves whether the modern novel, which has no 'historical' setting and objects to be suspected of having it, is not, more than it knows, a debtor to Scott, in its exposition of manners and character,[1] or has not learnt, in its happier moods, something from the simplicity and vigour of his appeal.

It has come about that the very qualities which are Scott's best defence against the libel of 'antiquarianism' have suggested to some critics a second disability. If width of range and energy and rapidity of movement save his art from musty service to Dr. Dryasdust, they lay it open to the charge of being unkempt. The reader is asked to choose between the old finery of historical waxworks and the rough-and-tumble of the slop-shop. Carlyle, strange to say, leads the main attack on Scott for his "extempore style of writing," and girds, *more suo*, against his rapidity and

[1] Which includes praise of Scott's "skilful adaptation of discourse to the natural varieties of age, sex, and disposition," as first pointed out by J. L. Adolphus in his *Letters to Richard Heber, u.s.* (Letter v., p. 78).

lack of "soul's travail,"[1] though he allows, rather inconsistently, that the style is for the novelist's purpose "the only good mode." Scott, it is true, is never a perfect artist from the grammarian's point of view. He often shocks the punctilious by his indifference to the niceties of phrase and concord. Much the same charge has been preferred against Dumas and the less 'historical' Balzac, and it stands as a sort of general warrant against all the minors of prose romance. We may wonder rather that Scott's sinning is not greater than it is, when we think of the extent of his work and his untiring speed of production. Finesse in such circumstances was impossible. He was conscious of this, as when he writes thus in his *Journal*: "J. G. L. kindly points out some solecisms in my style, as 'amid' for 'amidst,' 'scarce' for 'scarcely.' 'Whose,' he says, is the proper genitive of 'which' only at such times as 'which' retains its quality of impersonification." Well! I will try to remember all this, but after all I write grammar as I speak, to make my meaning known, and a solecism in point of composition, like a Scotch word in speaking, is indifferent to me. I never learned grammar; and not only Sir Hugh Evans but even Mrs. Quickly might puzzle me about Giney's case and horum harum horum.[2] I believe the Bailiff

[1] *Essays*, vi., p. 73.

[2] *Merry Wives of Windsor*, iv. i. 55-56. ('*Jenny's* Case').

in *The Good-natured Man*[1] is not far wrong when he says 'One man has one way of expressing himself, and another another, and that is all the difference between them'."[2] Carlyle and his echoes have been much concerned with Scott's lack of plan and perilous fluency. Shakespeare and Milton, Goethe and Schiller, Petrarch and Dante are cited for homily to the "mob of gentlemen that write with ease." "Cease therefore, O ready-writer," says the Sage, "to brag openly of thy rapidity and facility. . . . Write easily, by steam if thou canst contrive it, and canst sell it; but hide it like virtue! 'Easy writing,' said Sheridan, 'is sometimes damned hard reading!' Sometimes; and always it is sure to be rather useless reading, which indeed (to a creature of few years and much work) may be reckoned the hardest of all."[3] After these honest platitudes, the shade of Hazlitt's milliner[4] may wonder why novels so 'hard' as well as 'dry' survived her favourite *Agnes*, and still survive. Scott himself gives us a hint or two how to meet this criticism. "I am sensible," he says, "that if there be anything good about my poetry or prose either, it is a hurried frankness of composition, which pleases soldiers, sailors, and young people of bold and active dispositions." He helps us better in the conversation between the

[1] Act III.
[2] *Journal*, 22nd April, 1826.
[3] *Essays*, vi., p. 74.
[4] *Spirit of the Age*, 'Scott.'

Author of Waverley and Captain Clutterbuck, in the Introductory Epistle to the *Fortunes of Nigel*.[1]

Captain. Common gratitude to the public, which has received you so kindly, and to the critics, who have treated you so leniently, ought to induce you to bestow more pains on your story.

Author. I do entreat you, my son, as Dr. Johnson would have said, "free your mind from cant." For the critics they have their business, and I mine. . . . I am their humble jackal, too busy in providing food for them, to have time for considering whether they swallow or reject it. To the public I stand pretty nearly in the relation of the postman who leaves a packet at the door of an individual. . . . But I deny there is any call for gratitude, properly so called, either on one side or the other.

Captain. Respect to yourself, then, ought to teach caution.

Author. . . To confess to you the truth, the works and passages in which I have succeeded have uniformly been written with the greatest rapidity; and when I have seen some of them placed in opposition with others, and commended as more highly finished, I could appeal to pen and standish, that the parts in which I have come feebly off, were by much the more laboured. . . .

Captain. You should take time at least to arrange your story.

Author. That is a sore point with me, my son. Believe me, I have not been fool enough to neglect ordinary precautions. I have repeatedly laid down my future work to scale, divided it into volumes and chapters, and endeavoured to construct a story which I meant should evolve itself gradually and strikingly. . . . But I think there is a demon who seats himself on the feather of my pen when I

[1] pp. xxxv. *et seq.*

begin to write, and leads it astray from the purpose. Characters expand under my hand; incidents are multiplied; the story lingers, while the materials increase; my regular mansion turns out a Gothic anomaly, and the work is closed long before I have attained the point I proposed.

Captain. Resolution and determined forbearance might remedy that evil.

Author. Alas! my dear sir, you do not know the force of paternal affection. When I light on such a character as Bailie Jarvie, or Dalgetty, my imagination brightens, and my conception becomes clearer at every step which I take in his company, although it leads me many a weary mile away from the regular road, and forces me to leap hedge and ditch to get back into the route again. If I resist the temptation, as you advise me, my thoughts become prosy, flat, and dull; I write painfully to myself, and under a consciousness of flagging which makes me flag still more; the sunshine with which fancy had invested the incidents, departs from them, and leaves every thing dull and gloomy. I am no more the same author I was in my better mood, than the dog in a wheel, condemned to go round and round for hours, is like the same dog merrily chasing his own tail, and gambolling in all the frolic of unrestrained freedom. In short, sir, on such occasions, I think I am bewitched.

Captain. Nay sir, if you plead sorcery, there is no more to be said —he must needs go whom the devil drives.[1]

[1] Cf. too, the Introduction to the *Chronicles of the Canongate*, p. xxix. "Thus we begin to cross a strong river with our eyes and our resolution fixed on that point of the opposite shore, on which we purpose to land; but, gradually giving way to the torrent, are glad, by the aid perhaps of branch of bush, to extricate ourselves at some distant and perhaps dangerous landing-place, much farther down the stream than that on which we had fixed our intentions." And cf. J. M. Barrie: "There are

Scott at least knew himself. What could be better than 'hurried frankness,' or what more suggestive of his wizardry than this plea of a bewitched quill? How could he explain more fully to us that covenant with Romanticism which he would not allow himself to declare? If he distresses some good people, because, in verse and in prose, he is too narrow in his methods and range of form, because he does not write *other* kinds of fiction and on *other* subjects, and verse in *other* metres, it may satisfy a larger public that his work is always so fresh within the area of his choice. If his slipshod English and his digressions vex so many, and are taken for sin, because he *could* write with the best, as in his anonymous articles in the *Quarterly*, there may be as many who will acknowledge that he has given more than compensation in the 'life' of his telling, and that his vices lose their viciousness in the circumstance of his art.

Scott is the most representative Scot. Perhaps he is also "the greatest man whom Scotland has produced."[1] There is no doubt that outside Scot-

writers who can plan out their story beforehand as clearly as though it were a railway journey, and adhere throughout to their original design—they draw up what playwrights call a scenario —but I was never one of those. I spend a great deal of time indeed in looking for the best road in the map and mark it with red ink, but at the first bypath off my characters go." (See Hammerton, *J. M. Barrie and his Books*, 1900, p. 177.)

[1] Mr. Patrick Robertson at the Theatrical Dinner in 1827 (*supra*, p. 253), after Sir Walter had left the chair.

land he has been, and remains, the best known and most influential of her writers. No single author of repute better expresses to the Englishman and foreigner the fundamental qualities of northern literature, the actual and daemonic, though in the latter respect he is less typical than many. No one has shown a wider knowledge and a deeper sympathy with the national life; no one has understood so fully or expressed so happily the character of his countrymen. It is Scotland's good fortune that, by reason of his literary talent, his personality, and the opportunities offered in the early nineteenth century, he became the mouthpiece of Scotticism to the world of letters. His message has perhaps meant more, spiritually, to Europe than to his native land, where, though he is honoured, he yields to Burns in the affection of the general. "It may be asked, it has been asked," says Hazlitt, "Have we no materials for romance in England? Must we look to Scotland for a supply of whatever is original and striking in this kind? And we answer 'Yes!'"[1] Scott found the Scotland which Smollett failed to find; and more truly than Miss Edgeworth, his early model, found her Ireland. He has made it a place of pilgrimage, as no other literary man has done before or since. The enterprise of railway managers and business men is built upon his

[1] *The Spirit of the Age*, 'Scott.'

reputation. He discovered the Trossachs and Rob Roy and Jeanie Deans for Scotsmen—and Abbotsford for Americans. But, more than this, he found the secret of a new art, and for literature a new zest. Scotland may well be grateful to him for what he showed her, and be proud that Europe eagerly claimed to share in the lesson.

CHAPTER X

A MODERN EPILOGUE

The reader may ask whether all that has been said about persisting traits in Scottish Literature and about its influence upon others is of more than historical interest. Modern conditions seem to put the thesis of a well-defined and sustained Scotticism to a very severe test, if not to make it preposterous for any time after the eighteenth century, when the Scot encouraged himself to forget his differences as best he could. The literary historian finds, as he passes from Hume to Sir Walter, that it is increasingly difficult to segregate his "Scottish" writers, and that he has often no better excuse for a label than the accident of birth or residence, or the choice of subject or dialect. The public to-day, whether of London or Edinburgh, does not trouble itself about the matter, except when, roused by the accent of Drumtochty, it convinces itself that it hears the "true Scottish note."

And first, let it be declared, at the risk of

being tedious in repetition, that we rule out the whole company of "stickit ministers" and all the things done and said within reach of "bonnie brier bushes." Perhaps this intimation is less necessary than it would have been some years ago, even to those who are unfamiliar with the ironies of *The House with the Green Shutters*. Yet severe judgement of the Kailyarders may involve others who are not parties to their folly. Because that 'school' stood for Scotticism, and because its claims are now peremptorily dismissed, too many may conclude that there is nothing more to be looked for, that, in a word, the notion of northern idiosyncrasy, obvious and traditional, must be wiped off the critical slate. The suggestion that English literature is still touched by Scottish influences is taken in a "well-if-you-like" way, as good-humouredly as the Highlander takes the Cockney sportsman in his August kilt. Strangeness is pastime, as the tall hats of the elders of Thrums, and Forfarshire dialect in English actors' mouths, are of an evening to a London pit. What is accepted as northern is accidental and external, even if it escapes Kailyard exaggeration, and the work of reputable writers who happen to have been born beyond the Tweed is allowed to follow southern habit in all essential things. There is laziness in this judgement, and some inconsistency with what the Englishman confesses about "imper-

fect (perhaps imperfectible) sympathies." He still finds his Caledonian something of an enigma—adaptable, if he is to explain to himself the fellow's proverbial success, and immutable, because the bore who disturbed Charles Lamb still gets in his way; and yet he would assume that the riddle of literature is offered in simpler terms. This may be a return compliment for the Scot's having made common cause with the South; but if it means that the old ways are forgotten, that individuality is surrendered and power to influence lost, then this Scot is not he whom the Englishman professes to know so well. Had the northern partner busied herself with a "Renaissance," harped on the sorrowful Deirdres and eloquent Dempseys, hoed the cabbage-patch and dressed the kitchen-table to better purpose, or out-tartaned Kiltartan, she might have had readier recognition of 'nationality' in literature—or opera-bouffe. But Scotland has given her Stevenson and Lang and Barrie to the common purpose, as Ireland has given some, greater than her Shaw and Wilde and Moore; and it is in these, rather than in the eccentrics who write "in the manner of thatched houses," whether after the Galloway or Abbey Street pattern, that serious criticism dares to look for the deeper and abiding differences in literary character.

Nor, having declined the testimony of the Kail-yarders and Perfervids, need we take account of

that honester patriotism which clings to the translated Scot, even the most confirmed in English ways—his "salmonlike instinct to revisit his native waters," his choice of northern settings and story, his toying with memories. It is all as it should be that Stevenson's art turns so often to the homeland for action and colour, as his jaded body yearned in its Samoan paradise for the stinging winds of an Edinburgh spring; that Lang's, in its range from blue china to the ritual of Peru, is ever reminding itself of a corner in the north-east, and, when there is a Scottish mystery to be unravelled or tale to be told, will forsake Homer and the Myths of the Sun; that Quality Street will go to Thrums for week-ends. It is no more than the Frenchman or Englishman does, and it is of no critical moment in any comparative estimate. Such confessions do not interpret that inner Scotticism which exile, willing or unwilling, cannot deaden. Even when none are offered and all provincial millinery is laid aside, and the Scot would be taken for a good Londoner, but for the tattling of *Who's Who*, the ancestral habit of northern letters remains.

Like his literary forbears, the modern Scot is all for observation or given over to dream, a realist or a fantastic, busied in gathering up the little intimacies of life or in teasing experience. Sometimes he will indulge both moods, as, in our fathers' day, in *Phantastes* and *David Elginbrod*,

and, in our own, in Fleet Street Eclogues and Ballads of Nuns, or in the humours of Kirriemuir interiors and the eccentricities of Tinkle-bell and the most admirable Crichton. An unrepentant antiquary, who will destroy the glamour of the *Tales of a Grandfather*, will be the best maker of Fairy-Books for our grandchildren. Another writer can "keep his eye" on the Paisley of his youth and wander through an eerie Dominion of Dreams, with less risk of artistic strabism than the Good Man in the *Night Thoughts* encounters in his spiritual activities.[1] Though the moderns more often choose the intimate and actual, there are few in whom irresponsible humour does not find its opportunity. We know how Stevenson's art, the most precise and self-considered, is touched by a freakishness which adds a decorative charm, welcome because unexpected or discordant. We see it in his disciples and in others, in their escape, each in his own way, from the oppression of fact; as in one in bookish affection for the mystery-lady of Iona; in another not less by his brisk piling up of an effect and the daring freshness of his colours than by his whimsical defiance. We know these traits and are perhaps less surprised at finding them in contemporaries than in their literary ancestors. No one will claim that these are

[1] "One eye on Death and one full fixed on Heaven
Become a mortal and immortal man." (Bk. v., ll. 838-9.)

exclusively Scottish, either in the past or now, but their persistency gives one the right to think of them as characteristic of northern work.

Some of the defects, arising in part from the practice of these moods or from the see-saw between them, still remain, though not without compensations in the changed conditions of literature. The love of detail never made for constructive strength. Scott's strong sense of movement did not always save him, at least from cheap criticism on that score. Stevenson found it hard to sustain a plot, and good judges have been willing to agree. Sir James Barrie has confessed his inability to plan a long tale. Lang, who, with all his vagrancy, had the classicist's sense of proportion, failed notoriously, and not only when he was a venturer in romance. Their zest of observation is indulged at the expense of the narrative momentum or the pictorial unity. But it helps them in the narrower ranges. They are masters in episode, and are accepted by their least generous admirers as guides in the finesse of the short tale and other Tanagra-work of present liking. This too has its historical interest, for we have seen how the older literature eschewed the epical and all the longer flights. And it would not be hard to show that the voluminousness of Scott and of others in prose does not controvert this critical generality.

There is, too, a narrowing-down in subject, with,

again, a corresponding intensiveness within the areas selected. We do not find, for example, much love-making. This is an old northern reticence. We are not forgetting Burns and others of good, if lesser, repute. They are lyrical, and immediate. But the Scot generally declines, like his "douce gudeman," to give his public confidences on his own wooing or on other people's. At all events, he refuses to be analytical, and but rarely tries to tell a love-story with any elaboration. Again, perhaps for connected reasons, he is shy of drawing female character. For though in Scott's gallery we have the masterpieces of Rebecca of York and Jeanie Deans in one kind and Meg Merrilies and Madge Wildfire in another, and in Stevenson's Catriona and Barbara Grant and perhaps a third, we feel that Scott's women characters are, if we take his efforts together, neither 'star' rôles nor indispensable to the setting, and that Stevenson's, even outside *Prince Otto*, are a sort of synthetic femininity, intelligently but rather bookishly contrived. If Sir James Barrie knows what every woman knows, or what some men think about them, he is rather unwilling to share his secrets. This reserve is not peculiar to the Anglo-Scottish brethren in these latter days, for there has been a general reaction against the old sentimental obsession; but the Northerners are more emphatic and united in silence. It may be that the purrings and

cooings at Drumtochty and Aldersyde are to be explained as a protest against this coldness, just as the domesticities, as practised in these Arcadian spots, have been made much of, to the end that modern Scottish art may be redeemed from its unwholesome delight in pirates and venturesome 'bad men.'

When we speak of this enthusiasm for the picaresque and mysterious which so disturbs the Kailyard we touch on yet another matter of eld. For in this too there is no discovery or rediscovery. Scott encouraged it. He loved nothing so much as to trace the fortunes of masterful barons, 'reivers,' and the lesser disreputables, in whom an ordinary "shirra" would have had no more than a professional and passing concern. Deacon Brodie and his cronies enjoy their place as by long use established, and mysteries of Pavilions on the Links and Suicide Clubs and problems of Thrawn Janets compass, familiarly and easily, the whole range of Stevenson's contemporaries. The Barrie pirates and scallywags move in that new-old whimsical world where the real jostles the unreal in entertaining perplexity. The next generation will decide whether this revel in diablerie, in all its kinds, has been overdone, and may turn, though it gives no sign at present, to other motives which need not be tediously domestic or sentimental. But the critic who knows his business will make no mistake

about the traditional excuse for the excess, and he may be willing to allow that the indulgence has had a very definite effect on English literature, even outside the novel. He is not likely to trace the fashion back to Otrantine or Udolphine patterns, to the forgetting of this northern encouragement.

Nor will the critic be likely to neglect that other apparently incongruous aspect of so much of this pirate and swashbuckler romance, that it is written for readers who must not be old, or at least as elderly as the Cambridge dons whom Mrs. Radcliffe "kept out of bed o' nights." She, good lady, had no mission to very young people. Nobody then had, except certain bores of the school-marm sort who wrote dialogues on the kings of England and tales of priggishly good boys and girls. We do not realize—and here the 'we' includes both the schoolboy and his middle-aged parents—how new were such things as *Treasure Island* and the *Child's Garden of Verses*, or *Peter Pan* and *Tommy and Grizel*, or the yearly gift of a Fairy Book of the honest fairy kind; how they differ from all the older stuff, not only because they have atmosphere and real pirates and the heart of true adventure, in which even old boys can delight, but because they are written from the point of view of the young reader. The writers have thrown aside the senior's condescension, and are

young and companionable, no matter what deeper philosophy they may be suspected of conveying for wiser folk and some undergraduates of Balliol. There need be no disrespect to older favourites, even to the weaklier descendants of the *Pathfinder* stock; or any compulsion to hold that the children of those who in youth swore by the Ulster Scot Mayne Reid or the Scot R. M. Ballantyne are better judges or more fastidious in their choice. Yet, the changed attitude since Stevenson's day, the co-operation of higher literary talent [1] in providing the first lessons in romance, could not be without effect.

Indeed, it is in the consideration of this effect, not merely in the entertaining of the young person with better workmanship, and, perhaps, in the awakening of a sense that it is better, but in its bearing in a more general way on the evidence of higher literary quality, that we find some hint of traditional character in the writers of to-day. The eighteenth century Scot was as willing to admit as the Englishman was ready to point out that he was handicapped by the disabilities of the 'foreigner' in his efforts to achieve an English style. Whether he succeeded or failed, he never lost the craftsman-conscience, and the reader, even

[1] *Mrs. Leicester's School* is perhaps the only effort, in the days when England rejoiced in the *Story of the Robins* and *Sandford and Merton*, in which higher literary talent engaged itself—with what success no admirer of Lamb need be asked to say.

now, inclines to appraise him for his competence in the methods of the workshop as much as for anything else. He wrote well or badly; and, whatever his subject might be, he confessed his solicitude to be judged by his manner. This has not been without advantage, notwithstanding the sacrifices made by insisting on an excessive and tiresome self-criticism. It was all to the good that both writers and readers should be reminded that style had its claims with the other graces of literature, though neither above them nor disjoined from them; that even in a tale there might be something more to enjoy than the mere story. The Scot had never overlooked this, even in the romantic turmoil of the early nineteenth century, though Sir Walter at times seemed to hint to his public that they might well be indifferent to literary finesse, as a thing of minor importance when he could give so much else of the best. Yet even he could not weaken the old habit or stifle his own conscience, however much he chose to protest, and minors plodded on, showing, more than they imagined, how their care for form emphasized their lack of other literary virtues. But we draw a distinction when we come to Stevenson and the followers who do him and themselves most credit, for, whatever may be said of him by old-fashioned people, it is admitted that he wins his way not more by the gripping power of his narrative than

by the manner of his telling. It has been said, by no means extravagantly, that "nobody (unless we go back to Sterne) till Meredith, and after him hardly anybody in modern times till Stevenson, had obviously made his manner of writing an object, almost apart from the tale he had to tell." It may be that it is the essayist rather than the romancer who declares that he played the "sedulous ape" to Sir Thomas Browne and so many models, who speaks so seriously of "books which have influenced" him, who studies vocabulary and phrase and makes confession in an *Art of Writing*; and it may be, on the other hand, that the novelist, forgetting his *Prince Otto*, sometimes grows tired of this very discipline and prefers the stone in the rough to the selected and polished brilliant. It is, as it must always be, and should be, a matter of degree—that what is good for *Familiar Studies* is *prima facie* not so good for *Weir of Hermiston*. But the point is that even in his most romantic moments the discipline is there; and, not less important, that he showed his contemporaries that literary quality need not be a pedant's interruption to romantic action, and that he taught a larger body of readers to look for it and how to enjoy it. If it savour of paradox to say that this "most generous" author is also, in the words of Henley's appreciation, "sternly critical"—just as he has "a deal of Ariel" and "something of the Shorter-

Catechist," we must be content to say that Stevenson was a paradox. And, further, that his is the paradox of the Scot. The Northerner may still, and to the end of time, show "an uncontented care to write better than he can," and may continue, with varying success, the old struggle to obliterate the narrow differences between his and the Englishman's use of the common speech. Yet, though the weighing of words and the careful obedience to Stevensonian doctrine and practice are sometimes too obvious, and the scaffolding confuses the general effect, the work and the lesson are good. Had the work been less good, we should still have reason to thank these craftsmen for reminding us of some things which are likely to be forgotten in the rough-and-tumble of modern art.

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